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# *THE CHOSEN*



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*BY*

*E. J. EDWARDS*

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THE CHOSEN

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*To*  
*The Many*  
*who are called*  
*as well as*  
*The Few*  
*who are chosen*



# Chapter 1

(1)

**W**HAT'LL you give me for the crate?" The garage dealer looked from Rube Ward's puckered face to the jalopy.

"That antique? It's no good for anything. Except you want to put it in a booth at Coney Island. This ain't an amusement palace, kid. This is a garage."

"Yeah, I know. But the engine's good and you can knock off the gadgets and sell it for something."

"Nerts on that. Why do you want to sell it?"

"I'm going away."

"Is that so? Your family moving?"

"No. I'm going to another school, a place out in the Midwest."

"What's the matter with New York? You think they got better schools out there?"

"Of course not. This is a seminary."

"What's that?"

"A place for fellows to study to be priests."

"Priests? Like one of those guys in the church up on Melrose Avenue, with the black suits and the collars hind end to front?"

Rube laughed. "That's the general idea."

"Huh!" It was a contemptuous snort. "What's in it?"

"Does there have to be something in it?"

"Well, just like you said, 'that's the general idea,' isn't it?"

"Being a grease monkey isn't my idea of life."

"There's money in it."

"Money!" It was the boy's turn to be contemptuous. "That's all everyone thinks about—money. You can't eat the stuff, it can't talk to you when you got the blues, you can't take any of it with you."

"No, but it can get you classy clothes, travel, a nifty home, girls—whatever you want."

"There's got to be something else besides that or the whole thing is a washout."

"Don't kid yourself. The only thing that counts is dough. You know something? There's two kinds of people in the world, them that has and them that hasn't."

"Yeah. The poor want to get it and the rich want more of it."

"You can say that again. You want it yourself for schooling."

"That's different."

"Why?"

"The schooling will make me able to tell the cockeyed world that dough isn't everything."

"It will take a lot of schooling, kid, to make anyone listen to that. Believe me. I know." He pulled up the hood of the car and looked at the engine. "What did you pay for this heap?"

"Fifty bucks."

"It's had a lot of wear and tear."

"I put a lot of work in on it."

"Well, the rubber's in good shape. I'll give you thirty bucks for it. Here." He pulled out a greasy wallet and peeled off some bills.

Rube's eyes widened. "That's some wad you've got."

"Ain't I just after telling you? There's lots of dough in this



business for guys with the right kind of hands and the know-how. Keep that in mind, kid."

Rube pocketed the money, and as he went out of the garage he was whistling gleefully. The garageman turned to one of his mechanics. "See that kid, Tom?"

Tom, who had been an unobserved observer of the entire incident, made a pretense of dragging his attention away from his work. "Yeah?"

"A first-class mechanic if ever I saw one, but dumb—no more business brains than a hub cap. I just gave him thirty bucks for a crate that has a hundred-dollar engine in it." He laughed. "Do you know what he's going to do? Study to be a priest. Imagine that?"

Tom laughed cynically. "He's picked himself a nice soft job, I'd say."

"Soft job! What do you know about it?"

"Not much," admitted Tom. He spat on the floor. "I wonder if the kid does."

"You can bet your bottom dollar he does," retorted the garage owner with conviction. "We grow 'em smart here in New York."

"Well," observed Tom philosophically, "it takes all kinds of people to make a world." He shot a meaningful side glance at his employer. "Yes, sir, all kinds of people."

(2)

That same September, on a certain memorable afternoon, there occurred an event on the athletic field of La Salle College which has never been duplicated in the annals of that institution.

Red McNamara, the college's football coach, cast a glowering glance at Steve Kolesar as he sauntered out onto the playing field. His voice was deceptively polite as he spoke. "It is, indeed, a pleasure for you to grace this practice session of ours

with your presence, Mr. Kolesar. Your Highness has held up the entire squad for a half hour." His voice erupted into a roar. "Put on your uniform and shake the cement out of your socks!"

Steve's face reddened, but he made no move to comply. "I'm turning in my uniform, coach."

"You're what?"

"I'm quitting." The coach's lower jaw dropped open in amazement. "I'm leaving the school."

"Leaving the school? Over my dead body. What is it? Some professor hounding you?" Steve shook his head. "Some no good lickspittle scout has been getting at you, eh? What did he offer? What school does he represent? Out with it! Don't stand there like a dumb ox—speak!"

"I'm going to be a priest."

"A priest..." All the air seemed to go out of his lungs with the word. "Jonah in the whale's belly!" he breathed in wonderment. "A priest!" He looked at him. "You?" Laughter shook him. "Go on, you big lummo," he exhorted, patting Steve indulgently on the shoulder, "get into your togs. A priest!" He turned away as though dismissing the subject.

"You've got my notice. Good-by."

Red ran after him and caught hold of his arm.

"Are you serious, Steve?"

"I'm leaving next week."

"Come over here, boy. Sit down and tell me."

"There's nothing to tell. I thought it over, wrote to the seminary, and am accepted. Classes start next week."

The coach sat down on a bench, put his head in his hands, and looked hopelessly at the ground. After a while his head came up. "Tell me just how this came on. Somehow I can't see you passing around a collection plate or ironing out a tizzy in the Ladies' Altar Society."

"Ye gods! Is that your idea of what a priest is, a money chaser and a lady's man?"

"Well, not exactly, but, it's part of his job, isn't it?"

Steve made a violent gesture of dissent. "It's not his job at all!" he burst out. "A priest's a leader—a force—a—" He fumbled for words, and could not find adequate ones to describe his bright, shining aspirations.

The coach looked at him curiously. "You've got a lot of drive, son, but you've got to know where to direct it."

"I know what I'm doing. The whole country is run by a bunch of chiseling politicians, two-timing businessmen, and greedy bankers; not one of them can see any further than his pocketbook. That's the kind of leaders this country's got."

"And you figure you're going to change all of that?"

"Yes, I do. What about it?"

"Keep your shirt on, Steve. I just wanted to say it's a mighty big hunk you're biting off. Do you think you can chew it?"

"Of course I can."

"They're not just going to give you the ball and let you make ad lib plays all over the field. You've got to have that clear."

"I have. It's a six-year grind. You can't make leaders overnight."

"It's a tough league."

"I can take it."

"I guess you can. Well, I'm glad and I'm sorry, Steve. My first All-American and I'll never have a chance to show you off." His hand closed on Steve's in a firm grasp. "You're going the best way, much as I hate to say it. This is all settled?"

"Signed and sealed."

"How about the boys giving you a little supper Sunday night before you go?"

"Thanks, coach, but no. I've got a lot of things to do yet, packing and all the rest of it."

"Well, good luck then, and—God bless you."

Slowly Red McNamara turned back to the field. The best all-around center he had ever handled, and he had lost him

beyond recall. A player was snapping balls to a quarterback, who was practicing catching them and setting them up for placement kicks. Red McNamara suddenly started running, and, just as the quarterback placed the ball on the ground, the coach's toe met it in a kick that had behind it all the pent-up fury of his loss. The players stopped their drill and gazed at the ball as it soared, end over end, through the air. It seemed as though it would never come down to earth again. One of the squad began to step off the distance. It was the longest kick ever witnessed on that field, and the record still stands.

(3)

The evening show at Proctor's Theatre was over, and swarms of people milled about in the brightly illuminated space beneath the marquee. Dick Whelan conducted Ruby through the jostling crowds.

"Let's take a streetcar, Ruby," he proposed.

"It's late, Dick. The old man will howl if I'm not in on time."

"Let him howl. I've got something important to tell you."

"O.K. then, the cars."

They boarded a Third Avenue streetcar and found it entirely deserted except for a tired drudge half asleep in a corner. They settled themselves in the far end of the car. The conveyance clattered noisily on its iron rails beneath the grim canopy of the Third Avenue elevated.

"Well, what's the important news?" asked Ruby.

"This is our last date, Ruby."

"What!"

"I'm going away."

"Going away? Where?"

"To Ohio."

"Good grief! Ohio! That's a million miles away. What are

you going out there for?" She suddenly clutched his arm. "Dick, you're in trouble!"

"Don't get dramatic. I'm not in any trouble. I'm going to a school out there. It's—it's a seminary."

"A seminary!" She leaned back, and a tinkling trill of appreciative laughter spilled from her lips. "That's a hot one!"

Dick's face colored. "What's wrong with it?"

Solicitously, she felt his forehead and then, taking hold of his wrist, went through a pantomime of counting his pulse.

"Cut the clowning. I'm talking straight."

Dick's countenance was dark with resentment and, seeing it, she let go of his hand. "I guess you are." Her voice held wonderment. She stared at him a while. "How did this happen, Dick? Did you go to a revival or something?"

"Why? What's wrong with being a priest?"

"Nothing that I know of, except—correct me if I'm wrong—they don't marry, do they?"

"No, they don't marry. So what?"

"So what, he says!" Her temper flared at his indifference. "And what about me?"

"What about you? I don't see how you figure in this at all. We're not engaged or anything, are we?"

"I—I could hit you."

She drew away from him and they sat in hostile silence until the car brought them to 149th Street. They got off and walked down the deserted street. Finally Dick broke the awkward silence.

"Look, Ruby. I'll be gone a long time. I don't want to go away and leave you feeling like this. I know you're pretty peeved but—"

"Peeved! You've been running me ragged for almost a year and now you decide to breeze off and leave me flat on my face."

"I know it looks tough, honey, but I just can't help it. It—it just happened. What are you going to do about it?"

"What *can* I do?"

"Be nice about it."

"Send you away with a smile—that sort of stuff, eh?" She walked on in sullen silence and then, after a while, since he made no offer to speak, she said: "I don't get it. You like me, don't you?"

"Sure I do."

"Well, then why are you running away from me?" Dick shrugged hopelessly. "What has all this been—playing games? I thought you loved me."

"Oh nuts, love—what do you know about love?"

"As much as any fat-headed man does. What do you think I have been going out with you steady for?"

"See? That's what I mean. Your idea of love is just a routine—dates, movies, dances and the rest of it. That's not love. It's just looking out for your own good time."

"And what were you doing all this time? You weren't thinking of yourself—oh, no. Big, generous-hearted Richard!"

"O.K. I went through the routine, too, but I didn't find anything in it. That's why I'm chucking the whole thing. It's not real."

"You'll find it, the real love, out there in that collection of dried up monks? Ha-ha! It's a laugh."

He looked at her tolerantly. "I don't expect you to understand, Ruby. You couldn't. You're all wrapped up in yourself, and you think everyone else is the same. We just don't talk the same language."

She bit her lips to restrain the impetuous retort. They stopped before the steps of the tenement where she lived. "Is this final?"

"Final? What do you mean?"

"Don't you ever come back?"

"Oh, sure. We get a couple of vacations, but that's not going to make any difference. I'm going to go through with it. It's right for me. I feel it."

"You've sure got a lot to learn about yourself."

They entered the hallway of the tenement building, and, suddenly, Ruby turned and threw her arms about him. He looked at her a moment in smiling condescension.

"Calm down, kid, calm down. I'm not going to the guillotine or something."

"I'll never see you again, Dick. I know it. I know it."

"Oh, shush. You may write—"

She pulled away from him. "I may?"

"Well—I guess so—once in a while. I don't know. You'd better wait till I write you first."

She came close to him again. "You'll think of me sometimes, Dick, won't you?"

"Sure, sure." He pulled out his watch and looked at the time. "Gosh, it's late. You had better get in. Good night, Ruby, and good-by." She turned her face up to him, and he kissed her and then rushed down the steps. Ruby went out onto the stoop and watched him stride off buoyantly into the darkness.

A policeman, who had been a discreet spectator of their farewell, came steadily across the street and stood at the bottom step of the stoop. "Miss Ruby, who was that young scallawag you were bidding such an endearing farewell to?"

"Dick."

"Dick Whelan? You must be getting quite thick with him. Watch yourself, young lady."

"I—I was saying good-by to him."

"I noticed that."

"He's going away to become a priest."

"A—a what?"

"A priest."

"Glory be to God! Him? It's an age of miracles we are living in!" He went off wagging his head.

(4)

"I've never asked you for anything else, dad," pleaded Joe.

"That doesn't enter into the matter," replied Doctor McBride, his right eyebrow lowering portentously. "You know I've had other plans for you."

"But I'm not interested in being a doctor."

"Have you given it enough thought?"

"Enough to know that I don't want to be a doctor."

With one smooth gesture Doctor McBride drew the tortoise-shell rimmed glasses from his nose, folded them, and began to tap them thoughtfully on his portly front. It was his customary attitude when probing for the symptoms that held the key to a patient's illness. "How long have you had this notion of becoming a priest?"

"I've been thinking it over seriously for the last couple of months. Ever since we had that talk with the Bishop."

"We! We! Who is we?"

"I and the other fellows, Dick, Rube, Steve and Martin."

"So that is why you're so set on going—because they are!"

"I don't think so. Of course we've always stuck together, but each of us made his own decision. When the Bishop gave a talk at the college it hit all of us differently, but each one of us figured it was what he wanted."

"I don't like it. I have no objections to the priesthood, of course, you must understand that. But I don't think your health will stand it. It's a rigorous life they lead in those seminaries."

"Is it going to be harder than a doctor's?"

"Yes. If you took up the study of medicine you would not be cut off from the comforts and care of home. Out there you will be alone and have to face up to it like the rest of the students."

Joe's face was a trifle sullen. "I can't be wrapped in cotton-wool all my life. This is something I want to do, dad."



"I haven't forbidden you a thing up till now, son, but this is one thing I do order you—put the entire idea out of your head. Believe me, I know best."

"But, dad—"

"That will end the matter. The whole thing is too stupidly adolescent for discussion." Irritably he walked to the window and stared unseeingly into the street below. After a while he spoke. "I shouldn't wonder but that the Brothers at school are mainly responsible for all this." He turned and faced the boy. "A transfer to City College seems indicated."

Before the mute tragedy that showed in his son's face at this pronouncement, Doctor McBride had no defense but flight. Abruptly he strode from the room. He loved the boy dearly, the more so because of his frail health and his usually brave acceptance of it. The idea of losing him, of exposing him to the hardships of life in a seminary, had cut him to the quick.

When Joe did not respond to the summons for supper, the doctor went to his room. Joe was seated at his desk, his head buried in his arms. He looked at the boy a moment. "It's time to eat, Joe."

"I'm not hungry," came the muffled reply.

There was an awkward silence; then the doctor spoke. "Just why are you being so obstinate about this, son?"

Joe lifted his head, and his eyes fastened on his father's face. "Don't you see, dad? It's the real thing; just like your own work, only better—and—and wider—healing, taking care of the ones who don't know where to go when they are hurt and homeless, the ones that are lost, the crippled in body, oh, all the people that don't count in this world. The priest cares for them. There's no comfort or hope for them unless someone does. I know it's a big job, but it's something worthwhile, it's—it's what I want to do."

"I know, I know, son. But can you see yourself in that kind of a life—alone? You have to be physically strong."

"If you want it hard enough, you can be anything."

"A physical unfitness doesn't disappear by an act of the will. I ask you to be practical about this matter, Joe."

"Practical! The whole world's practical—practical and hard. I don't want to be practical."

Joe's head dropped back onto his arms. For a brief space of time Doctor McBride stared at the disconsolate figure. Then he came over and sat down. "Does it mean all that to you, son?"

There was no reply.

His hand reached out and touched the boy's arm. "Joe," he said, and at the gentleness in his voice Joe's head came slowly upright. "Against my better judgment—you may give it a try."

(5)

The music dimmed as the priest left the altar. An old, black-gowned Brother appeared and slowly, carefully began to extinguish the candles.

Martin Manning looked at his mother, kneeling at his side, her head still bent in prayer. She lifted her face and turned to him, and, as though by mutual consent, they rose and left the church.

The late summer air was cool in the streets, the clang of the 149th Street crosstown trolley coming noisily through the evening's darkness. In silence they walked down Westchester Avenue. To Martin the lights and sounds of the street were remote with the remoteness that long familiarity brings. For this street was his street; he had walked it so many times, on his way to church and school, and it was dear to him with all the treasured memories of boyhood.

A string of elevated trains swept around the bend from Third Avenue, and, of a sudden, the street was overwhelmed by the racketing fury overhead. Martin's face darkened, the very depths of him stunned by the whirlpool of sound that frothed about him. All the days of his youth that rushing of

the trains had haunted him, rumbling and tumbling fearsomely through the hours of sleep and dream, thrusting and smashing its thundering madness into all the daytime's moments of play and thought. It called to him with its impetuousness; it confused him with the futility of its treadmill sameness.

To him it was the voice of the city, the pulse of its mad rushing, and he feared it. For deep within him there was an awareness of the hard purposefulness of the city's self-seeking ways and of its power to sweep people into its whirlpool of savagery. It seemed to him that as long as he could remember he had wanted to fight free from it, and yet now that the moment of liberation was at hand there was an overwhelming reluctance to leave it. And yet, with it, the desire to go still persisted. For there had come to him, with ever-growing clearness, the realization that he must go away in order to find and bring back the healing that the city's sickness of hate and self-seeking needed.

The trains clattered away into the death of distance, and he became aware of his mother's fingers clasping his own. She was always understanding of his moods, his silences. And she was that way with everyone, understanding and sympathetic.

"Dad's still sore. He won't talk to me."

"He doesn't like the idea of the expenses, son. If you do well he will be boasting all over the block. You know him." She gave a little sigh. "Only one more week," she said.

"Seven small days." He admitted ruefully. They had come to Brook Avenue. Across the street was the small apartment that was home. Martin's hand held his mother back from crossing the street. "I don't want to go in yet, mother."

They turned back and walked slowly up the avenue. His mother lifted his hand and pressed it to her side.

"I've thought it over so much since you told me, Marty, and I know it's the greatest and best thing that could happen to

you, and I'm proud." She lifted her face to his and there was a faint mistiness in her eyes.

"Why be sad then, mother?"

"It's—it's all so new and—and unexpected—the idea of your going away. I haven't got used to it yet."

"It won't be so long, mother. There are ten weeks' summer vacation, and I can write often."

"Yes, it won't be too long. I'll look for your letters. There will be so many new things to tell me." But there was no happiness in her face as she said it.

"I hate to go," burst out Martin.

She turned to him quickly. "I thought you wanted to go."

"I do, and I don't. Here everything's just a lot of noise and rushing around. Maybe it will be different out there."

"There isn't much real happiness in life, son."

"I know it, mother, and it's—it's—oh, it's not right. It should be different, shouldn't it?"

She looked at him, seeing in the smoothly molded lines of lip, and brow, and cheek her own youthful self dreaming the dreams of youth. "Yes," she said, "it should be different."

"Then why doesn't somebody *do* something about it?" The words burst forth from him, startlingly loud.

She clasped his arm reprovingly against her side, looked up at his indignant, protesting countenance, and then gave a resigned little sigh. "The war lock is in sight again." A thick strand of hair had come down over his forehead. He pushed it back into place. "How are you going to learn to wear a biretta?" she wondered.

He made no reply. He knew what her change of subject indicated. His voice had been too loud. What a stupid time for him to start ranting again. Shamefacedly, he looked away from her. They were passing some lighted store windows. With one poignant thrust the realization of leavetaking struck deep. Soon, very soon, all these lighted displays would be things of memory. His mother would walk to church alone.

His arm tightened against hers and he forced his voice into a flat casualness: "Let's have a soda, mother."

Her arm responded to his pressure. "It *is* warm tonight, Martin, and—and we won't have another chance for a long time. I'll treat."

They went into the Greek Kandy Kitchen and seated themselves at a white-topped table. Solemnly they sipped their sodas. There was a chatter of talk from the customers, and the music from a juke box mingled with the sweetish smell of confections. Their mood gradually lightened, for there were light and laughter here, and, for the moment, separation and aloneness seemed far away.

## *Chapter 2*

THE road ran straight, without bend, twist or turn, a mile and a half through flat farm lands. On some of the fields conical shocks of harvested corn stood in straggling lines, like abandoned tepees; on others there remained a mere stubble of grain, where the harvesting machine had passed. At the end of the road rose two square towers, the pointed summit of each surmounted by a bleak black cross. This was St. John's Seminary.

From the window of his office, Father Stoner, prefect of the Theologians, had a clear view of the road. There was a single auto on it, rolling sedately towards him. With unblinking intentness his steel-blue eyes followed the auto's progress, but no sign of any emotion showed in the straight line of his thin-lipped mouth. The long, square-tipped, purposeful fingers of his hands lay unmoving on the window sill. He was a tall, thin rapier of a man. "I am averse," he declared, "to admitting students who have not gone through a preparatory seminary. I have spoken clearly enough to Father Rector on that point."

Father White, prefect of the Philosophers, focused his thick-lensed spectacles on the back of his colleague. "The Bishop," he vouchsafed, "has dire need of priests in his southwestern diocese. He is a close friend of Father Rector, and I imagine it was impossible for Father Rector to refuse his candidates."

Father Stoner turned slowly about. "Impossible?" He picked up a blank sheet of paper from the desk and, holding a corner of it in his left hand, slowly slid the tips of his right index finger and thumb along the edge of it. "Undiplomatic is, perhaps, the more correct word." Thoughtfully he marched the edges of the paper and then creased it in the center, with a firm relentless pressure of his fingers. "This will mean an added burden to you."

"I don't think it will be an insupportable one," came the unruffled reply. "Their letters showed excellent motives, high idealism."

"Idealism!" Father Stoner's fingers put another ruthless crease in the paper. "That's a phase everyone goes through. In time, a person outgrows his idealism. Everybody will tell you that—after they have lost it. Without the discipline of hard work, idealism is a flash in the pan, a velleity." Father White remained silent. "I do not question their motives but their previous training."

"A vocation is of God."

"Granted, granted. But the fostering of that vocation is in our hands. There must be a basis for us to work on. Most of the candidates we have had from colleges have lacked the necessary fundamental preparation. Few of them, very few, have persevered."

"It is an age of enthusiasm, of change, of novelty," replied Father White tolerantly. "They have lived in the midst of it for several years—the sports, the nerve-excitement, the rapidly altering fashions in music and reading and dress. It is only natural if seclusion, discipline and steady work prove difficult for them."

"That precisely is the trouble. They come to us with the notion that they are joining an army with banners flying."

"I don't doubt that they do, but modern youth are realistic, too. If the real spark is there, they measure up to any and all demands."

"I'm afraid you're over-optimistic about American youth, Father."

"I've handled many of them."

"I've handled more."

"I know that."

Father Stoner turned back to the window. The auto had crossed the four-lane highway that paralleled the front of the seminary. Slowly it passed through the entrance, swung around the elm-shaded driveway and came to a stop before the arched portal's long, broad flight of sandstone steps. He watched the boys descend, noting with disapproval their gay apparel. "The meeting of incompatibles," he declared in a somber voice, and, automatically, his fingers put another slow crease into the folded paper. "I hold small hope for any of them to last out the year."

"Not even one?" Father White's voice held mild amusement in the face of this portentousness.

"You know how it is, Father—many come; few stay." He tossed the folded paper into the wastebasket.

The door was closed. They set down their satchels on the top step and one of them pressed a button at the side of the door. A bell sounded indoors, strangely remote and far away, and, at once, a constrained, expectant silence fell upon the group of five.

Dick Whelan turned and gazed back over the road they had traveled. With sudden poignancy, he was aware of the highway and its scurrying cars, the far-reaching flat fields, the buoyant blue of the sky, the tang of the brisk autumn air. For one flashing moment he was possessed by an insane desire to run down the steps out into that freedom stretching before him, to thumb a ride from a passing car, to scamper helter-skelter about the clean-swept fields, to breathe deeply of the vivid air. Abruptly, the door opened and he turned at the sound of its opening. A kind-faced Brother smiled hospi-



tably at him. Dick picked up his satchel, and, accompanied by the others, stepped across the threshold. The heavy wooden door closed behind them. They were in another world.

It was a dimly lighted world, high-ceilinged, with spotless terraza floors, and a curious cloistral smell pervading it. No pulse of activity beat in it, not the ghost of a sound disturbed its deep stillness.

They looked at each other, hesitantly, wonderingly, five boys from the Bronx—Dick and Marty, Joe, Rube and Steve—five boys, who, by yielding to one shining impulse, had been whirled out of the hurly-burly of life into this unearthly backwash. They had played and sung together, they had gone to the same college, and a similarity of fundamental likes and dislikes had banded them together in an intimate, exclusive fraternity of their own. As they looked about, with growing dismay, at the rigid lines of chairs against the parlor walls, the same thought was in the minds of all of them: How had they got into this place? They had all known, of course, that it would be different, but not this different!

“How do you do, gentlemen?” The faces of the five swung towards the door. “I am Father White, prefect of the Philosophers.” He was a small man, his straight blond hair parted at the side. The thick, rimless spectacles gave them the uneasy feeling that they were under the merciless scrutiny of a microscope, but there was a friendly smile about the wide-lipped mouth. “I have a list here. May I have your names, please?”

They called off their names and he checked them against the list.

“Bring your satchels. I’ll show you to the dormitory.”

He led them down a long, high-ceilinged corridor to a stairway. Laboriously they mounted the steps, Father White in the lead, with Dick at his side.

“The super salesman,” muttered Steve, nodding towards Dick who was busily trying to make conversation with the priest.

"He has to be making an impression on someone," agreed Joe. "If it's not girls, it's priests."

Somewhat out of breath, they came to the fourth floor. A double door admitted them to a large dormitory. White curtains had been stretched on iron piping to form cubicles. The rest of the class, some fifty young men, had already assembled and stood around in various stages of stiffness and embarrassment.

Father White consulted his list. "Let me see, let me see. We'll begin here." He stood in front of a cubicle. "Wurmser—Aloysius Wurmser!" he called out.

A mousy, slope-shouldered individual pushed his way to the side of the Prefect. Father White studied him a moment, then gestured him forward. "This will be your cubicle."

It was at the end of the row, and had a window that provided an attractive view of the garden and of the distant woodland. There were some whispered comments and a few envious glances.

Father White seemed oblivious of this sudden interest and proceeded with his task, but when he came to the next cubicle that had a window, he paused for a moment. At once the group crowded around him, and the thick-lensed spectacles lifted to the circle of expectant faces. "Is there anyone among you who likes fresh air?" he asked.

"I do, Father. I'm a fresh-air fiend." Dick's brisk avowal drowned out several other less courageous voices.

"Hm." The myopic eyes were on him. "Very good. There is room for some others—"

"I'm strong on fresh air, too," broke in Martin.

"Me, too," echoed Steve and Rube and Joe.

The other four had come briskly forward to take advantage of the opening created by Dick.

"I'm sorry; there's only room for four," said Father White apologetically.

Joe, being the last to voice his love for ozone, was accord-

ingly dropped back into the limbo for the lovers of stale air.

Father White walked on down the aisle, assigning the cubicles in rapid order. Time and again he came to ones with windows, but, although the four kept close at his heels, he seemed to have forgotten them. At long last his task was completed and all the beds had been assigned. Only then did he turn to the quartet. "If you will follow me," he invited.

Wondering mildly, they trailed after him as he strode from the dormitory. Midway in the main building they came to another set of stairs, narrow and steep. Girding up his cassock, Father White plodded upward two stories, and, through a low door, admitted them into a big, barn-like attic. Racks for trunks lined the walls. There was a box-like protrusion on both sides of the attic. He went to one of them and flung open the door. "We are short of room this year, so we must use this tower," he blandly announced.

The room had been equipped with the same kind of curtained cubicles as the main dormitory. He assigned one of them to each of the boys. The corners of his mouth twitched suspiciously as he noticed Dick's disappointed gaze studying the small embrasures that did for windows.

"These towers were not really intended for habitation," he explained in a dry voice, "and so the work was rather slipshod. The window frames are a bit loose, and I am afraid the place is rather drafty. But you are all advocates of fresh air." He smiled a guileless smile.

"Yeah," mumbled Dick. "We like fresh air, Father."

"A second-year Philosopher, Mr. Ferguson, will be here in about an hour. He will conduct you about the grounds. Have your things arranged by then, gentlemen."

They listened to his footsteps pattering through the vast emptiness of the attic, and then the shutting of the attic door told them that they were alone.

Steve rounded on Dick. "Boy, what a lunkhead! Fresh air!"

Rube laughed violently. "It's like a sieve." He rattled a window frame.

"And two more flights of steps to go up every time we want to get here," complained Martin. "We'll be bowlegged in a week."

"Well, how was I to know?"

"You and your big mouth!" ejaculated Steve.

"One radiator for the whole place," announced Rube. "We'll freeze to death when winter comes."

"It's a swell view," announced Martin from one of the embrasures.

"Anyhow we're all together," said Dick.

"How about Joe?" retorted Martin.

"It's just as well he didn't get thrown in with us. He'd have double pneumonia before Christmas," remarked Steve gloomily.

Rube came bursting in from an exploratory trip in the attic. "Hey, guys, the toilet's out there and a faucet—only cold water."

They went out and inspected the clean but simple arrangements. "Brother!" ejaculated Martin. "I sure hate cold water on a winter morning."

Grumbling, they went back to the room and began to unpack. Their few intimate possessions were soon arranged and gave the place a homelike touch. The sight of a familiar photo on the wall, a cherished baseball trophy in the corner, a school pennant over the bed did much to restore their spirits.

An hour later their guide arrived and they set forth on their tour of exploration. As they wandered about through the buildings and grounds their mood of eager curiosity gave way to one of deep satisfaction and quiet elation, for this was as they had pictured it.

Stands of Austrian pine sentineled the northern rim of the campus. Farther afield lordly elms and oaks and maples lifted aloft their flame-colored autumnal foliage. Briskly they strode

off for a walk into the clean, untouched beauty of the woodland. The soundless calm all about them, after the confusion and noise of the city, brought a feeling of strangeness. Here there was no sound, no movement, and gradually, without their being aware of it, their steps slowed, they moved forward in a more leisurely fashion. Imperceptibly, the strangeness wore away, and in its place there was a peacefulness, a restfulness.

At sight of the spacious park a sense of satisfaction filled all of them. There were carefully kept lawns and winding walks and two good-sized ponds. From a bridge that spanned the dam between the ponds they had a clear view of the building. Its solid lines gave them an impression of power and fulfillment. To them it seemed a castle, straight-walled and strong, a fit training ground for the knights who were to champion the cause of the weak and needy.

They entered the hushed stillness of the library. Mutely, they went past serried shelves of volumes; in whispers, they read out the titles of some of the ponderous tomes. They were subdued, almost reverent, for they were in the presence of the great.

Slowly they went from the library and came to the place wherein the inspiration of the world's great minds would be imparted to them. There were lecture halls and laboratories, auditoriums and music rooms, all modern and well-equipped but starkly efficient. The refectories contained only the essentials; the corridors were unadorned; there was a simplicity about everything that was like a breath of clean fresh air.

On first entering the massive church they were overwhelmed by a vague feeling of barrenness, of solitude, but then the red glow of the tabernacle lamp caught their gaze. They knelt down, and the peace and the power of the place entered into them. The conviction that they were shut away from the world and yet were at the very heart of the world filled them with contentment.

Later on in the day their guide conducted them to the study hall. They were assigned seats there, as well as in the chapel and in the dining room. At the book shop they were loaded down with an ominous assortment of textbooks, which they carried to the study hall and arranged in their desks.

"Three volumes of philosophy!" Steve's voice was awe filled.

"Good grief! They're almost all in Latin," said Rube.

"That will be duck soup for Dick," said Martin. "Look at all this other stuff." He lifted up one after the other and read out the titles of the various volumes on geology, patrology, oratory, Greek, astronomy, and Gregorian chant.

There was not a moment of that day that the five had to themselves, and when evening sent its long shadows across the fields and wrapped the buildings in somber darkness the calm calling of the Angelus bell signalled a welcome ending to a full day. Tiredly they mounted the steps to the dormitory and prepared for bed. At 9:30 P.M. the lights blinked once as a signal that they would be extinguished five minutes later. Five minutes later the lights went out. For a moment there was deep silence in the dormitory, and then a medley of voices mingled in the dark.

"Bed's pretty good, isn't it, fellows?"

"Swell!"

"This isn't as tough as I thought it was going to be."

"Not hard to take at all, at all."

"But didn't that parlor give you the chills?"

"That was just a first impression."

"It's different when you get to know the place."

"You feel at home when you get the hang of it."

"It's all right for my money."

"That swimming pool!"

"And the library!"

"And the gym!"

"I wonder how Joe's getting along?"

Sudden silence filled the room.

Steve cleared his throat. "Who asked that?" he demanded.

"That was Marty," replied Dick.

"Ye gods, Marty, don't start getting maternal. Joe's all right."

"He's got a better set-up than we have," agreed Dick.

"Yeah, less fresh air," chimed in Rube.

"I was just wondering," came Marty's apology.

"Well, forget about it," ordered Steve. "We're supposed to get up at 5:30 A.M. One of you guys had better give me a shove. I sleep like a log."

They chorused their good nights, and soon there was only the sound of their measured breathing.

## Chapter 3

AT 5:30 A.M. Father White flung open the door and clanged a hand bell that startled them into immediate activity. They hunched over their washstands and blundered through their ablutions. The water was cold and the unheated air of the attic chill and unfriendly. Fumblingly, they dressed in the unfamiliar Roman collar, cassock and cincture. The darkness of night still shrouded the landscape outside the windows.

Before they were aware of it the day had caught them up in its routine and they were moving from one duty to another: morning prayers, meditation, Mass, breakfast, a half-hour study, and then the round of classes.

Fifty black-gowned figures piled into the lecture hall. For several minutes there was complete confusion as they jostled about, each one seeking to find the chair assigned to him. Dick's place was at the left of Rube's. They put their textbooks and notebooks down on the arms of their chairs.

"Where's Marty?" whispered Rube.

"Up front. Over there." Dick's finger pointed him out. "Steve's there, too. I can't see Joe."

Rube hitched at his cassock. "I feel lost in this thing, Dick. Have I got everything right?"

"I guess so. How does mine look?"

"Like it was made for you."



"It was. Your cincture's worked around."

"It's always doing that, confound it!" He twitched it into position at his side. "They've got good deep pockets—"

"Sssh!" came a warning hiss.

Abruptly all talking ceased.

A clock in the corridor began striking the hour, and simultaneously there advanced into the lecture hall a small, bespectacled professor in a much-worn cassock. With toed-in, mincing steps he went up to the platform, deposited a book on the desk, faced the class, and with downcast eyes and in a thin, uninflected voice, said a prayer. With much scraping of chairs, the class settled back for a little introductory to the study of philosophy.

The professor's hand went inside the breast of his cassock and came forth with an astonishingly large open-face watch. He unhooked it carefully from the chain that held it, gave the stem a few precise turns, placed it meticulously at the side of his book, and then looked up at the assembled young men.

Father Lallande's gaze had the simple, shy directness that is found in the very humble or the very wise. "The textbook we use is in Latin," he began, "and all the lectures will be conducted in Latin. You may ask questions in English if there is something you do not understand, but all the definitions must be learned in Latin. The terminology is concise and invariable, and since you shall use it in theology it is wise to use it now. Open the first volume of your book."

There was the dry flat sound of fifty book covers flipped against the wood of the arm rests.

Father Lallande remained facing them, one hand folded meekly over the other, the textbook completely ignored. It had long since become for him a professorial prop, something that one carried to and from one's lectures, as a man with two sound legs carries a walking stick.

"The word philosophy," he went on, "is derived from the

Greek words φιλεῖν, σοφία which means the search after wisdom and it is defined as: *Scientia rerum ratione humana cognoscibilium per causas vel rationes ultimas naturali lumine comparata*. First—it is *scientia*, that is *cognitio acta per causas*.”

The voice was as impersonal as a scalpel, probing into each word of the definition, exposing the various types of meaning it could possess, cutting away the irrelevant ones, baring finally to the students’ gaze the exact and only meaning in which the word was to be understood.

Rube wrote two words in his notebook: “Cold Potato,” and gestured Dick’s eye to his estimate of their philosophy professor. Dick leaned over and placed heavy ditto marks under each word.

“Patristic Latin,” explained Father White, “is different in many respects from the classical Latin of Cicero, and you may have a little difficulty at first with several of the constructions. But we will speedily get over that, with a little attention and application. Who will try the first sentence? Let me see—Mr. Whelan.”

Dick bounced to his feet.

“You may remain seated,” said Father White easily.

Dick sat down. He had a flair for languages and was fully aware that Latin was his strong point.

“*Saepe igitur magno studio, et summa attentione perquirens a quamplurimis, sanctitate et doctrina praestantibus viris...*” Calmly and confidently Dick began to read through the involvements of Vincent of Lérins’ opening sentence. When he came to the end of the twelve-line period he was slightly breathless, and lifting his head caught a look of worryment on Steve’s face. Steve had trouble with Latin. Dick gave him a reassuring smile, and smoothly began to translate.

“Very good, very good, Mr. Whelan,” commended Father White. “I do believe that fresh air is an aid for clear reading and ready translation.”

Broad smiles broke out over the faces of his classmates, for they had discovered where Dick was lodged. Dick grinned good naturedly, the open praise of his work offsetting the comment on his misguided forwardness.

With many a halt for an accent and with many a pause for a spiritus asper, Steve plowed through the first two verses of St. Mark's Gospel.

«Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ...»

"Quite an effort, Mr. Kolesar, wasn't it?" commiserated the professor of Scripture.

"I'm not used to Greek."

"Translate it now, literally, please. If you have any difficulties you may consult the Latin version, the Vulgate, on the opposite page."

Steve's eyebrows went up. Consult the Latin? Huh! What a help that would be! Seizing the book tightly in his big hands, he floundered valiantly forward into the Greek morass.

At midday they put away their books, and wended their way down the corridors to the chapel. A bell rang and the Angelus was said. They left the chapel and thronged into the dining room. Food was supplied for sections of four, substantial and sufficient food. Steve pulled up to the table with alacrity. "Thank God," he confided to Joe, "they don't eat in Latin."

"Sssh!" cautioned Joe.)

Steve looked up. A seminarian had mounted a rostrum and opened a book. Above the subdued noise of spoons came his voice:

*"De Imitatione Christi, Liber Primus. Qui sequitur me, non ambulat in tenebris, dicit Dominus."*

"Ye gods!" Steve muttered. "Even at meals! They eat the stuff!"

Dazedly he spooned his soup.

They came into the open air, and, for a moment, stood staring blankly about them, vaguely confused by the sunlight and the wide freedom of the campus. An hour of recreation was allowed them after lunch, just one hour.

"Let's do something, quick," urged Steve.

"Do something?" echoed Martin. "What do you think has been going on since 5:30 A.M.? I'm taking a rest."

Martin made his way up the six flights of stairs, pulled off his cassock and lay down on the bed. His eyes closed and suddenly snapped open. At the foot of his bed was the benign face of Father White.

"Are you sick?" he asked.

Martin bounced upright. "No, Father. Just a little sleepy."

"You're supposed to be out on the campus now."

"Do I have to go?" asked Martin complainingly.

"That's what the regulations say."

Martin stood up, climbed into his cassock, and dutifully followed the Prefect out onto the campus.

"A good brisk game of handball will drive away the sleepiness," advised Father White.

Martin had other ideas, but he removed his cassock and entered the game. A bulky, moon-faced seminarian was his opponent, and he beat the sluggish Martin resoundingly.

"You're not so hot," crowed his opponent at the end of the game.

"I'll take you on again some day when I'm awake," retorted Martin as he put on his cassock.

They sauntered away from the court. Martin looked up at his companion. "My name is Manning," he offered. "What's yours?"

"Peters. The fellows call me Puff."

"Why the Puff?"

Peters looked at him with an apologetic grin. "I like cream puffs."

"So do I. But where are you going to get them around

here?" They walked for a while in silence and then Martin said: "What happens next on this merry-go-round?"

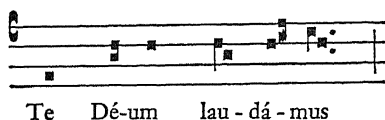
"Half-an-hour study period at 1:30." He looked at his watch. "It's that now."

A bell clanged its strident summons and at once the seminarians began making their way towards the building.

At 2:00 P.M., as the clock in the corridor was striking the hour, Father Lallande again crossed the threshold of the lecture hall. He said the prayer, unhooked his watch, opened his book and resumed lecturing at the precise point where he had stopped that morning. For one hour the class sat and listened and took copious notes.

There was an harmonium in the next classroom and a dreamy-eyed little priest had chalked on the board a pot-pourri of hieroglyphics vaguely resembling a modern musical score. "Gregorian chant, the official music of the church, is composed of melody and rhythm." Steve gave a happy sigh. English at last! "The melodic signs are called neums and are divided into simple notes and neums of two, three or more notes. There are various types of simple notes: the *punctum quadratum*, the *virga*, the *apostropha*, the *oriscus* and the *quilisma*."

Steve rubbed the palm of his hand over the back of his neck. The sentences were English, but the words were Latin.



They were singing the ancient hymn of gratitude. Steve's voice rose and fell with the notes, but his mind just then was not in accord with the spirit of the song.

The recreation at 4:00 o'clock was a blur. They had tum-

bled out eagerly into the brisk air beneath the open sky, and it seemed that they had just begun to play a game of soft ball when a bell rang. It was 5:00 o'clock. They went to the chapel and prayed the rosary. Then came a spiritual reading. At its conclusion the lights in the sanctuary went on, the candles were lit, and the Benediction service followed.

The recreation room, in spite of its radio, billiard table and magazine rack, had no hominess about it. After supper, the Philosophers straggled into the room, and one of them turned on the radio while a group gathered about the billiard table. Some drifted over to the magazine rack, while a few others sat down to games of chess or checkers.

The five found a remote corner of the room where they could be by themselves.

"Am I tired," moaned Joe, as he draped himself over a chair.

"You can say that again," agreed Martin.

"And don't think you're going to get a rest," said Dick. "Look at Creepy over there."

"Who?"

"Creepy. That's what they call Father White. He's always pussyfooting around."

Father White was moving casually about the room, stopping occasionally at the side of some forlorn-looking seminarian and quietly managing to draw him into conversation and companionship with the others.

"Tending to his chickens," said Martin darkly.

"What's the matter, Marty?" asked Dick. "Did he give you the works already?"

"Routed me out of bed after lunch; and then he leads me out to the campus by the nose."

"Who was that bird you were playing handball with?" queried Rube.

"That was Peters, Puff Peters."

"Puff?" asked Joe inquiringly.

"Yeh. He likes cream puffs."

Rube's lips twisted in a wry grin. "He'll sure get them here."

"Cream puffs," said Joe with a longing reverence in his voice.

The rest of them looked at him pityingly.

The recreation period dragged to its uninteresting conclusion. A bell rang, and they went to the chapel for night prayers, and from there made their way to the study hall.

The Beadle, a seminarian appointed to be in charge of the study hall, clapped his hands once and they all stood and said a Hail Mary. They sat down and desk covers banged as books were dragged out. Silence gradually settled down over the room.

The door opened and Father White stepped in. "The first ten minutes of this final study period," he announced, "are to be used for reading the Scriptures in the vernacular, the Old Testament." He stood quietly, looking at them, and they looked back at him dumbly, awaiting a further pronouncement from the oracle. None being forthcoming, the desk lids banged open again, and Bibles were produced. "At the conclusion of this study period all shall retire. From 'lights out' till the recreation after breakfast the *Summum Silentium* shall be observed, the Great Silence. It means no talking whatsoever." He walked quietly from the room.

Dick had only read portions of the Old Testament. He opened the book at random and his eyes fell on these words: "How beautiful art thou, my love; how beautiful art thou! . . . Thy lips are as a scarlet lace and thy speech sweet. Thy cheeks are as a piece of pomegranate . . ." Avidly, Dick paged back to the first chapter. He had to get this from the beginning.

They plodded up to their aerie and weariedly sat down on the edge of their beds. The day had finally ended. Dick lay back on the pillows, pictures from the Canticle of Canticles crowding through his head.

Suddenly Steve's voice broke the silence. "Bells, bells, bells! I feel like a fire horse."

"What a day! Boy, what a day!" said Rube.

"I'm bushed," contributed Martin.

"I sure picked the right place," said Steve with heavy emphasis.

"You sure did," came Rube's hearty assent.

"I was thinking of joining the Jesuits at first," explained Steve. "What a mistake that would have been! They ring a bell every *fifteen minutes*."

"Thank God for small favors," breathed Martin fervently.

"Say, what's happened to Dick? Did he pass out?" asked Steve.

"How beautiful art thou, my beloved, how beautiful art thou. Thy lips are as scarlet lace . . ."

Steve jumped to his feet and pulled aside the curtain of Dick's cubicle. "What's the matter, Dick? Dick, what's wrong?"

"Wrong? Nothing's wrong. Did you ever read Solomon, Steve? There's really something in that Old Testament."

"Ye gods!" snorted Steve disgustedly as he snapped the curtains shut.

Martin wearily dragged on his pajamas, and knelt at his bedside. Dick pulled aside the curtain that separated their cubicles. "Hey, Marty—" he began. "Oh, 'scuse, please."

Martin stood up. "It's O.K. I'm finished."

"Didn't you get enough prayers today?"

"You bet your sweet life. But the way I feel I'm going to need all the cherubin and seraphim on my side." He slid into bed and groaned luxuriously. "Gosh, this feels good."

"Go to sleep, you guys," growled Steve.

"Who wants to sleep in this frigidaire?" asked Dick.

"That fire alarm goes off at 5:30 tomorrow morning," warned Steve.

"Boy, that's right," said Rube. His shoes hit the floor, and



there was a vigorous thrashing sound as he began kicking his feet up and down to take the chill off the sheets. After a while the noise subsided, and then Rube's voice cut into the silence, mimicking Father Lallande's precise tones. "Philosophia—from the Greek φιλεῖν, σοφία, which means the search after wisdom.'"

Dick burst out laughing. "He's a hot number, isn't he?"

"I get the heebie-jeebies when I think of listening to him every day for a year," worried Rube.

"Aw, he won't be so bad," consoled Dick. "We'll be able to put it over him like a tent. The one who gets in my hair is Old Creepy." The door of the room had noiselessly opened and Father White entered. Rube could see the Prefect's shoes beneath the curtain, and a great gust of laughter caught in his throat and kept him inarticulate. "He caught me in the dining room after supper. I was picking up some unfinished dessert. He's all over the place. He fades in and out like—like—"

"Like the Ghost of Banquo," murmured Martin sleepily.

"Yeah, that's it. Like the Ghost of Banquo," assented Dick heartily.

The curtain slid softly back disclosing Father White's placid countenance. "*Summum Silentium*, Mr. Whelan, *Summum Silentium*," he admonished.

Completely paralyzed, Dick stared at the apparition. The Prefect's gaze traveled down his recumbent length, and Dick suddenly realized that he was lying on top of his bed, fully clothed. He jumped to his feet. "Yes, Father," he whispered, and hastily began to pull off his cassock.

The curtain fell back into place, and Dick hurriedly undressed and jumped into bed. He strained his ears waiting for the click of the door to signal the departure of the Prefect, but no sound was forthcoming. Eventually, a gurgling noise from Rube's cubicle announced that the coast was clear.

"What are you laughing about?" hissed Dick.

"Banquo's Ghost," burred Rube's laughter-choked voice.

“Didn’t I tell you? Boy, talk about the F.B.I.—”

A faint noise cut short his sentence, and he quickly turned over and pulled the covers about his ears. After a while he fell asleep. It was a deep, dreamless sleep that was shattered by the remorseless clanging of the bell.

Outside the windows it was still dark as pitch and inside the room it was chatteringly chill. The boys tumbled out of their beds; they were fogged with slumber and half stupid with their sudden awakening, but the cold water shocked them into complete wakefulness. They donned their cassocks and made their way to the chapel.

## Chapter 4

FOR six weeks the tides of study and prayer flowed over the seminary. Punctually, from dawn to sunset, the *Vox Dei*, in the shape of a brazen bell, sounded its summons over the surging tides of duties, ending one labor and calling to another. At its insistent clamor the seminarians plodded onward, framing syllogisms, paradigmizing Greek verbs, probing the sciences, kneeling at prayer.

Thursday, their weekly holiday, was the one rift in the routine. It offered the possibility of an all-day hike, or bicycle trips or games—simple events, but events eagerly looked forward to by all the seminarians.

It was a Thursday morning in late autumn, a crisp clear day. At the seminary gates, groups of Philosophers, uniformly dressed in dark suits and black ties, lolled about.

Martin and Joe, searching for Dick, came to a sudden halt at sight of their quarry. For a moment they stared at him. It was like meeting someone they had known a long, long time ago. He was standing at one side of the entrance, his coat unbuttoned, his hands deep in his trouser pockets, and the sun glinted on his wavy, light-brown hair as his head turned in an interested study of the passing cars. This was the Dick they had always known, nonchalant, suavely sure of himself.

It was good to have him back again. They came up and greeted him. He turned, and they saw their mistake. The twinkling eagerness was gone from his eyes, the firm white teeth did not show in an easy smile. Somewhere in those past weeks of deadening routine, the Dick they had once known was lost.

Wordlessly, they stood at his side and watched the cars whisk by. A convertible coupe, glossily red, its chromium fixtures gleaming, flashed into view. Enviously, the eyes of the trio followed it down the road.

At a more moderate pace, a four-door sedan rolled past. The bright treble of children's voices, exclaiming excitedly at sight of the lofty towers, came clearly to their ears. Longingly, the three watched the car disappear in the distance.

With a bludgeoning roar, a huge truck, loaded with bricks, lumbered by. As it came abreast of them they could see the driver's ruddy, unshaven countenance and hear his voice uplifted in song:

“...hang my heart, on a weeping willow tree...  
Fare thee well, fare thee well, fare thee we-e-ll.”

Moodily, the eyes of the trio remained fixed on the truck until it was out of sight.

“I'll bet not one of them ever heard of an enthymeme or a sorites,” snapped Dick with bitter vehemence.

Martin looked at him. “So what?”

“So they're having a good time.”

Broodingly, the three of them looked at the empty road. After a while Martin turned to Dick. “Where's Steve and Rube?” he asked.

“They're appointed to haul the lunch,” replied Dick listlessly. “Steve's in charge and Rube is running the car.”

“Let's see them when we get to the lake,” proposed Martin. “We've got to talk this over.”

Father White walked down the steps of the main entrance, and all the Philosophers gathered about him.

"We will take the Washington highway and stop at the lake for lunch. Split up into twos and threes, but don't lag. Keep in sight of the group ahead. I'll lead the way. Mr. Whelan and Mr. Peters, will you accompany me?" He strode briskly forth onto the highway, and Dick and Puff fell into step at his side.

Father White breathed deeply and turned a strangely boyish face towards Dick. "It's a grand day, isn't it?"

"Yeah," came Dick's glum response.

"What?"

"Oh—yes, Father."

"Nothing like a brisk walk to get rid of the mulligrubs. Is it true that they don't speak English in New York?"

"Who said so?" retorted Dick.

"That's the consensus of opinion in Ohio and all points west."

"We were speaking English when Ohio and all points west were just trading posts."

"Yeah?" The priest drew out the word in perfect mimicry of Dick.

A look of surprise flitted across Dick's face. "That wasn't English," admitted Dick, "that was Bronx."

"I prefer your Latin," replied Father White. "You are doing well at it." Dick beamed. "Are you giving Mr. Peters a hand?"

"We practice talking Latin twice a week while walking around the park," vouchsafed Puff.

"Indeed? Who does the talking?"

Puff reddened. "Dick—I mean, Mr. Whelan."

"At all hours," agreed Father White, with a side glance at Dick. It was Dick's turn to get red.

"I don't get the idea, Father," protested Dick. "We're turning into mummies."

Father White looked at him with quiet amusement. "I've never met such a vocal assortment of mummies in all my days."

"You know what I mean, Father. We're boxed up all the time, and it's putting knots in our dispositions."

"Studies and wagging chins do not mix. Thought ripens in solitude."

"Maybe it does, but by the time thought is ripe the vine's going to be dead."

"You would be surprised at the vitality of our American vines." Father White lapsed into silence, and, in an abstracted voice, quoted. "'Silence is the mother country of the saints.'"

Dick looked at him indignantly. "Saints! Ye gods, Father!"

An amiable grin broke over Father White's countenance. "A temporary lapse. Too early in the morning for that. Let me see. You were going to get your quartet organized for us, weren't you?"

"We started practicing weeks ago. We've got two good numbers ready for the next club meeting," responded Dick.

Far back in the line Joe walked along with downbent head. "The way I see it, Marty, we're just sitting on a fence, watching life go by," he complained.

"Packed away in mothballs up in a tower," agreed Martin.

"Maybe if I were with you fellows in the tower, I wouldn't mind it so much."

"That wouldn't make any difference, Joe. You noticed the change in Dick, didn't you?"

"I sure did."

"Well, I guess everyone of us is changing."

Joe pondered this for a while and then suddenly blurted out: "Do you think it's worth it, Marty?"

"I don't know. I can't see myself bouncing out of bed onto a stone floor at 5:30 A.M. for the rest of my life."

"And swallowing all that hash they sling out."

"The food's good. You said so yourself the first week we were here."

"Sure, sure, Marty. But a fellow kind of gets a longing for some of the things he used to eat at home. I know the menus here by heart now." He looked up as inspiration struck him. "You know what would go good right now—a big gooey banana split."

"And how!"

Mr. Wurmser and another seminarian overtook them and strode briskly past. "The categorical syllogism is one that is made up of categorical propositions," the seminarian was reciting as they came within earshot.

"Latin, please, Latin," came Mr. Wurmser's pedantic request.

"Aw," protested his companion, "not while we're on a walk."

Joe looked at Martin disgustedly. "Wouldn't that give you a pain? Boning up on logic." He flung his hands out in a gesture of hopelessness. "Oh well, let's forget about it."

"Right. Too nice a day to waste."

"I got a letter from Alice yesterday," Joe went on. "She was asking about you."

"She was? Alice! Gee!" He looked at Joe. "Remember the last party we had at your house?"

"Do I?" Joe began to sing in a clear tenor voice:

"Let us live then and be glad,  
While young life's before us!  
After youthful pastime had,  
After old age hard and sad,  
Earth will slumber o'er us."

"We were practicing that song for a program at college," said Martin reminiscently, "and right in the middle of it Alice came into the room; and then Dick made that play in front of her."

"What play?"

"Don't you remember? He went up to her, put his hand over his heart and recited the last verse of the song:

"Live all girls! A health to you,  
Melting maids and beauteous!  
Live the wives and women too,  
Gentle, loving, tender, true,  
Good, industrious, duteous."

"That's right. I'd forgotten it. Funny you should remember it."

"I couldn't help but remember. It was so pat. Dick's got a way with the ladies."

"So have you. You danced with her."

"You mean while Rube played the 'Merry Widow Waltz' on his harmonica?" Joe nodded assent. "Oh, that was just fooling around. To tell you the truth, I was kind of surprised she danced with me even then."

"Why?"

"Why? Oh, you know me, Joe. I'm no great shakes at hoofing, and she dances like flowing music. Alice is a real person, Joe, gentle and considerate; and she's beautiful, too—you know that, Joe?"

Joe directed an amazed look at his companion. Alice was Joe's sister, and he had never noticed any of these lyrical qualities in her; moreover, he had always considered Marty a decidedly steady person as far as girls were concerned. He mumbled an inaudible reply, which Martin took for agreement.

They trudged on, no longer paying any heed to the cars that swept past them. The new sights, the unrestraint of speech, the freedom from walls and clanging bells, were all new and satisfying. After four miles of steady hiking they came to a village at whose edge the ground fell away sheer



to the lake. They scrambled down to the hard-packed sand of the beach, and found a picnic lunch all prepared.

Steve was busy ordering his helpers about, his red face beaming with satisfaction and importance. Rube was tinkering with the engine of the car, an ecstatic look stretching from ear to ear, and both arms smeared with grease to the elbows. Several times Martin and Joe caught a glimpse of Dick, trailing around after Father White like his shadow. Neither of them made any attempt to hold the intended council of war, for they were too busily occupied stuffing food into themselves, shouting at the others, exchanging quips, and in general acting like five-year-olds.

The breeze off the lake had an edge to it, and a roaring fire was built against the wall of the bluff. After all had had their fill of roasted frankfurters and hot chocolate, some second-year Philosophers broke out into the seminary song. At its conclusion, Father White, a half-eaten sandwich in one hand, turned challengingly to the group. "Any of you first-year men want to match that? How about your quartet, Mr. Whelan?"

"Sure, Father. Hey, Steve," he called out.

The five gathered quickly and went into a hasty consultation. They finally decided on *Gaudeamus Igitur*, the Latin version of the song Joe had recalled that morning. Rube preluded skillfully on his harmonica, and then the voices of the quartet lifted in sturdy, stirring harmony.

"Excellent! Classical!" applauded Father White. "I'll ask Mr. Peters to translate it—" Peters gulped in acute embarrassment—"some other time." He turned back to the quartet. "Haven't you something else a little more popular?"

"We've got a million of 'em, Father," Dick assured him. Rube's harmonica flourished a fanfare, and the quartet jumped into the lilting melody of "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers." The entire group began swaying and beating time against the rocks with their tin cups, and before long everyone was lustily

singing. Song followed song until the quartet's repertoire was exhausted.

Eventually, Father White called a halt to the merry-making. "Time is getting along, gentlemen. Let us put on those golden slippers and hike homewards. We will return by a different route, through the woods. Onward, Christian Soldiers."

The woods were blazing with autumnal fires, the leaf-carpeted ground under foot soft and yielding, the silent tree-lined aisles pleasantly dim and friendly. As they came into the final stretch of woodland bordering the seminary grounds, Joe was limping slightly, but his face was filled with a great contentment.

"I'm all plugged out, but I sure feel better. Don't you, Marty?"

"I feel swell. I guess we just needed a break."

"Old Creepy is a better doctor than my dad."

That evening Father White held his usual Thursday conference. The faces turned towards him were attentive, alert. They had taken the first hurdle, and were now ready for a more important one.

"My dear seminarians," he began, "the two eyes of the priest are learning and virtue. If either of them is missing he is only half a priest. A priest must be learned; he must, also, be virtuous; and habits of study and prayer are the means to that end. That is why these past weeks have been a routine of those two very things. But routine becomes mechanical unless there underlies it a living fire, an impelling reality. It is with the purpose of broadening the understanding of your vocation and deepening the motives of your coming here that you will enter upon the eight-day retreat, which starts this Sunday."

He explained to them that silence was to be maintained for the entire eight days, and that their only obligation would be to attend and meditate upon the conferences which the Retreat Master would give them.

## Chapter 5

THE side chapel of the church was filled with silent, black-gowned seminarians. Their expectant faces were a white blur, turned trustingly upwards towards the large crucifix that hung in stark aloneness upon the front wall of the chapel. But it was the small, clean-shaven, thin-cheeked man, seated at the table beneath the crucifix, on whom their eyes were so intently fastened. Outspread before him was the book written by the founder of the Society to which he belonged. The tips of his fingers touched the open pages. The basis of all he had to offer was here, in this slim volume, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius.

He opened his lips, and his voice, like his appearance, was placid and unassuming.

“What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?” He paused. “That question you have all heard, in the depths of your heart, and your coming to the seminary is your answer to it.”

The calm, self-possessed eyes gazed at them a moment, and when he began to speak again there was deep assurance in his voice.

“I am going to give you the foundation stone in the edifice of your life, the heart of your idealism. Here it is: *‘Man is created to praise, reverence and serve God, our Lord, and by*

*this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in reaching the end for which he was created. If you wish to reach your end you ought to be indifferent as to the means, in the same way that a workman is indifferent to his tools.' "*

Dick groaned inwardly. It was catechism stuff, formulated differently, but just as dogmatic in its assurance, and just as intangible in its sweeping generality.

Throughout that entire day the foundation theme was analyzed and clarified, and Dick listened with growing attention. He had been wrong. It was not just catechism stuff. This was an entire philosophy of life, for he saw how the use of creatures, riches, honors, health, reached forth and touched upon all of one's endeavors. It struck to the very heart of life, setting up all mankind into two camps: the good, who worshipped God by the right use of creatures, and the evil, who worshipped creatures by making them into gods.

The conference swung over into a portrayal of the main events of Christ's life. And now the placidity of the speaker deserted him. An intenseness came into his speech, a sort of joyousness shone out from his face, as though this was the subject closest to his heart and about which he could not talk long enough or impressively enough. The Person of Christ came alive before the eyes of his listeners; the poverty of the Man, the wisdom, the gentleness, the dignity, the silence, the tears—a humanity that embraced all humanity, a dignity that stood apart and yet drew all to it.

A sensible thrill pulsed through Dick; the idealism that had brought him here had taken form and substance and stood before him, real, attainable, because Another had gone before him and showed him the way. "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends." This was the reality that he had envisioned, the love that was divine in its fullness, the love that could die because it loved so much. In a slowly swelling surge the greatness of his discovery mounted

within him until it broke and overwhelmed him in a choking tearfulness. Desires, eager aspirations, exuberant ambitions crowded up in him, clamoring for fulfillment.

Seemingly unaware of the soul-shaking results his words were causing, the Retreat Master proceeded to hold some talks on the spirit of poverty, on chastity and obedience, on mortification and the value of time. Following the discourses now with rapt absorption Dick saw how everything revolved about and was related to the shining discovery he had made. He sank deeper and deeper into a world of inner silence and astonishing contentment. The outside world was a remote farawayness of pitiful noise and confusion and dissatisfaction. He was at the heart of things, moving swiftly and surely from one bursting revelation to another, and yet held fast in a well of stillness and complacency. The day's ending brought no regret, and the morning's rising saw him eager with expectancy. There was satisfaction in everything and with it a growing sense of seriousness as the conclusions were drawn from his hours of enlightenment.

On Friday there was a conference that dealt with many practical points of the seminary rule. Martin grew uncomfortably warm when the Retreat Master dilated on the problem of early rising, for it sounded suspiciously as though the words were directed at him. "The life of a true priest is a life of unselfishness. Your rising hour is 5:30 A.M. At that hour most people are still asleep, but you are up and readying yourself by meditation and Mass to spend yourself for their needs. It is the first act in a day of work for others and it will give the right direction for the entire day's activity. So rise promptly and readily. Saint Aloysius had the custom to spring from his bed in the morning as though the bed were afire. If you find the early rising hard, apply modern psychology to the problem. In the evening before falling asleep, keep in the foreground of your consciousness the determination to spring

up at the first sound of the bell. In the course of time rising promptly will become automatic."

On Saturday morning Martin entered the chapel at an uncommonly brisk pace. He stumbled slightly as he entered the pew, and the noise brought Dick up out of his haze of profound reflection. Martin's head was discreetly lowered, but a small strip of bandage showed with startling vividness across the bridge of his nose. Questioningly, Dick stared at him, but Martin refused to meet his gaze. Covertly, Dick glanced about to see if any of the other seminarians had noticed Martin's strange appearance. It was just like Marty to pull some outlandish stunt at a time like this. You never could quite figure him out. One look at his soft brown eyes and sensitive mouth and you began thinking of someone gentle and dreamy, like a poet, or a musician cooking up a sonata; and then he would break loose with some wild, tough escapade that had no rhyme or reason to it. Of course, Marty had a reason for it; he always did. But his reasons were all alike—they did not make sense. And the worst part of it all was that he could be painfully blunt in defending his motives. Since coming to the seminary he had behaved rather well. It was a crying shame that he had to break loose and get into some sort of fracas on this the very last day of the retreat. But these were thoughts that had no place during retreat, and Dick strove resolutely to put them from him.

Totally oblivious of how he had upset Dick's equilibrium, Martin unfolded a notebook and placed it on his knee, took out a fountain pen and poised it above the notebook, and then lifted the face of a guileless cherub toward the Retreat Master.

At breakfast on Sunday morning the retreat officially ended, and for the first few minutes a stiff silence pervaded the dining room. The organs of speech seemed to have dried up. Then one or two hesitant voices ventured some sentences, soon others joined in, and before long a gabble of sound had swallowed up the clatter of knives and forks and spoons.

The five friends met on the campus after breakfast, but there was a hesitancy to speak, a restraint in their manner hitherto unknown to them. They had become strangers. In one brief week the whole world had changed. They were different, shining with the clarification of their ideals, lifted up with the whole-heartedness of a wondrous discovery.

"That was a swell retreat, wasn't it?" finally vouchsafed Steve.

"The first one I ever made," replied Joe, shaking his head from side to side as though blaming himself for the long neglect.

"He really put it over," enthused Rube.

"It certainly told me a lot of things," stated Dick very seriously.

A long silence ensued, and in the midst of it Dick became aware of some strange incompleteness. He turned to Martin. "Didn't you get anything out of it, Marty?"

Martin's fingers tenderly massaged his jaw. "I got lockjaw, I think," he said.

"Ye gods!" Steve's hands flew upwards in a gesture of disgust.

"Well, man alive! I didn't talk for eight days. I feel kind of goofy."

"You act like it," put in Rube disapprovingly.

They walked along the road that circled the campus. After a while Martin offered a suggestion. "How about a couple of games of handball? Maybe that will bring me back to earth."

They looked at him, surprised that the days of illumination through which they had passed should still have left him so crassly conscious of mundane things. "I guess that retreat didn't do you much good," said Steve severely.

Martin looked at him blankly. "What's eating you, Steve? The Retreat Master didn't say we were to crawl into a hole and pull it in after us. What do you want me to do? Live in a cocoon?"

Steve stared pointedly at his nose. "It is pretty plain that you don't."

Puzzled, Martin's eyes met his gaze. "What do you mean?"

"How, in heaven's name, did you get into a fight during retreat?" asked Dick.

"A fight? I didn't have any fight."

Rube pointed at the patch of adhesive tape. "Well, then, how did you get your smeller smashed?"

Martin's hand went up and touched it. "That? Oh, that was an accident." His face reddened.

"What kind of an accident?" probed Steve relentlessly.

Martin thrust his hands into the top of his cincture and stared embarrassedly at the ground. Abstractedly, he scuffed the gravel underfoot with the heel of his right shoe. "You remember what the Retreat Master told us about getting up promptly?"

"Getting up promptly?" Steve gave him a blank stare.

"Yes, you remember—about the kind of a life the priest leads and that the first act of the day should start us off on the right foot."

"Oh, that!"

"He treated of a lot of minor matters," put in Dick, "so what?"

Martin looked up. "Well, I tried it."

They stopped and stared at him. Dick finally voiced their difficulty. "What—if any—is the connection between that and—that?" The last "that" indicated Martin's nose.

"Well, you see, it's like this," explained Martin. "I kept thinking before I went to sleep that as soon as the bell rang in the morning I'd imagine the bed was on fire—you know, like Saint Aloysius."

"And?"

"It worked all right. I just popped right out of bed as soon as the gong went off. But one of my legs was dead asleep; it



buckled under me, and I fell over on my washstand. My nose hit the basin."

"Ye gods! Was that what that racket was on Saturday morning?" asked Steve.

"It hurt like the mischief. But it's all right now. How about some handball?"

They turned away from him.

Father White, his head lowered in the concentration of preparing his Thursday conference, rounded a bend of the walk, totally unaware of them until their chorused "Good morning, Father!" broke the spell. He lifted an abstracted gaze to them. "Good morn—" His glasses suddenly focused on Martin's face. "Glory be! What happened to your proboscis?"

"I bumped it," mumbled Martin.

"Looks like it got caught in a door."

"No, Father. A washbasin."

"A washbasin?"

Shamefacedly, Martin was forced to repeat the details of his escapade.

"You certainly have come out of your first retreat with a memento," observed Father White.

Martin shuffled his feet, and attempted to change the subject. "How about some hand—"

"And that's just about all that he did get out of it," interrupted Joe.

"Really?" Father White's gaze seemed suddenly aware of the others. "A dented nose is small profit indeed for a week's work." He faced Joe. "Did you derive much fruit from the retreat, Mr. McBride?"

"I think so, Father. At least I know now what it's really all about."

"Indeed? What is it all about?"

"There was a conference on death, Father. It really made me think. We've got to do all we can while we can. There's

the sick and the orphans. I'd like to do lots of things for them, on a big scale. Hospitals, orphanages. . . ."

"There are quite a few already in existence."

"Not enough, though, Father. There's room for lots more."

"I guess there is."

"That's the reason for all the studies," thrust in Steve. "To do big things needs mental power. A priest has to be a brain. There are a lot of economic problems in the world today, Father, and the priest should be in front, leading the people."

"Hm." He paused. "Did you come to the same conclusion from your retreat, Mr. Whelan?"

"Well, no, Father, not exactly. As I see it, the priesthood's main function is one of love."

"To draw men to a knowledge and love of the Creator?"

"That's right. But you've got to be attractive to draw others. I don't mean good-looking, Father," he hastened to add, "I mean attractive in an intellectual and cultural way. The studies and the silence build up to that."

"You've uncovered the secret of the strong silent man's magnetism, Mr. Whelan."

"I don't put too much stock in that, Father," interposed Rube. "Of course it's right what Dick says, but the main trouble outside is riches. All the lying and cheating and the wars—it's all on account of money. We've got to live simply, poorly, and show the world how happy one can be without riches. Isn't that correct, Father?"

For a notable space of time Father White looked at the eager faces gathered about him, sensing fully the palpitant sureness of each boy's amazing discovery. Slowly, he took off his glasses, and nearsightedly studied the lenses for some non-existent smudge. "'Martha, Martha,'" he chided, "'thou art anxious and troubled about many things; and yet only one thing is needful.'" He replaced his spectacles, smiled gently at them, and lowering his head resumed his meditative walk.

## *Chapter 6*

AS classes resumed, the effects of the retreat were gratifyingly evident. There was eagerness at work, there was a steady consultation of watches at all times, and no one was late for a duty or a class. When the bell signaled the end of a recreation period the silence was as sudden and complete as though death had dropped from the skies.

Steve began, in his own words, "to wallop the books." He studied like a fury. Learning was needed for leadership, and the ideal of captaining others burned brightly in his soul.

Dick took to walking around with downcast eyes.

Joe's comments about the food suddenly ceased; and Rube astonished and edified all by wearing an old cassock, shiny with age and the friction of much usage.

The only external change noticeable in Martin was during the period of morning meditation. He took to kneeling upright throughout the entire half hour, edifying the others considerably, until one morning he slumped against Steve in a dead faint. With praiseworthy promptness and a certain amount of disturbance, Steve hauled Martin out of the pew with a powerful arm, and, aided by Rube, guided him out of the church.

As soon as the door had closed on them Martin pushed free of their grasp. "Let me alone," he ordered. "I'm all right."

"You sure you are all right, Marty?" asked Steve, one arm still solicitously about his shoulders.

"You ought to go to the infirmary and let the Brother give you something," advised Rube.

"I'm O.K.," mumbled Martin. "I don't need anything."

"What made you keel over?" asked Steve. "Stomach upset?"

Martin looked at them embarrassedly. "I fell asleep."

"Asleep!" they echoed.

"I woke up when I bumped against Steve," explained Martin, "but you guys had hold of me already, and I didn't want to cause a scandal; so I played along."

"How do you like that?" Rube burst out laughing.

Steve's face was crimson. "I ought to bop you one," he growled, "making a laughing stock out of us in front of the whole seminary."

"Hold it, Steve," interposed Rube placatingly. "Nobody is going to know anything about this but us."

"It burns me up anyhow," persisted Steve. "Here the rest of us are playing the game, really working at what was given us in the retreat, and he keeps pulling dumb stunts like this. Why doesn't he get wise to himself and start acting like a seminarian instead of a clown?"

"Let him alone, Steve," advised Rube. "You were so busy snoring last night that you don't have the whole story. Dick was knotted up with stomach cramps, and Marty was fussing around all night taking care of him. I woke up half a dozen times and heard him."

Steve looked at the culprit and noticed for the first time that his face was extremely pale and that there were heavy shadows beneath his eyes. "Is that the straight goods, Marty?" he demanded.

"Straight goods, Steve," agreed Martin mumblingly.

"You dumb bunny!" His hand took a friendly hold of his arm. "Why didn't you sit down during meditation?"

"I didn't know I was that sleepy," replied Marty with a weak attempt at a smile.

"Do you just use your head for a hatrack, Marty?" chided Steve. "You could have routed me out last night to help you."

"I didn't want to wake you, Steve."

"No; you wouldn't," said Steve with a resigned sigh, but his grasp tightened affectionately about Martin's arm.

So pardon was vouchsafed him. But Father White, not knowing the true state of affairs and ever on the alert to curb youthful imprudence, ordered him to sit through the meditation, thus relegating Martin to the inglorious ranks of the mediocre.

The seminary course was now in full swing, and while there was a noticeable increase in the attentiveness of the students, there was, too, considerably greater abandon in the professors' demands.

"They're sure piling it on," said Rube one day.

"Day in, day out," agreed Martin. "I can feel my head bulging at the seams."

"It's all I can do to keep up," worried Rube.

"Weakening, Rube?" asked Dick with a superior smile.

"Not exactly; but I catch myself remembering the time I was working in that garage last summer. Boy! What a snap that was!"

"This is what the movies call a 'continuous performance,'" agreed Steve, "and I mean continuous."

"I know what that *Ora et labora* sign over the entrance means now," contributed Joe. "Pray and work—that's the whole business."

Yet they were not discontented, for their days were full of achievement. The importance of little things had been impressed upon them. Small duties and fleeting moments were precious things contributing to the formation of the habits

from which would result the personal holiness and learning that would fit them to help others.

Their feelings of generous willingness were not allowed to be dissipated by desultory endeavor. Father White proposed to them the practice of the particular examination of conscience or, as it was generally called, the particular examen. Each of them was provided with a tiny notebook, and twice a day, at noon and at night, they were to examine their conscience regarding the attainment of some particular virtue or the eradication of some fault of character. The numerical result was to be noted down, and at the end of the week they were to add up the total.

Steve was rather outspoken in his opinion of this system of spiritual bookkeeping. "I want you fellows to get me straight," he began. "I'm all for everything here at the seminary. This is a mighty important training we're going through, and I don't intend to pass up anything that will help make us become good priests, great priests. But, from where I sit, it looks like this particular examen will make a hopeless introvert out of a fellow. It's not sound."

"It is too," maintained Dick. "*Divide et impera*, that's what Father White said—divide and conquer, one fault at a time."

"I guess it's all right," observed Joe, "I'm doing it, but it's—it's dated—medieval, if you get what I mean."

"It is not," defended Rube. "It's as American as Benjamin Franklin."

"Where do you get that?" retorted Joe.

"He kept a score sheet on himself. I read it in his autobiography."

"Well, maybe it is all right for some people," conceded Steve, "but I haven't got time to keep tab on myself all day long."

"That's the easiest thing of all," grinned Rube. "Look!"

"What kind of a gadget is that?" asked Steve.

"A counter. No bigger than a half dollar. Press this little plunger and it registers the number. Nifty, isn't it?"

"Do you mean you're going to cart that thing around in your pocket and click it every time you make an act of virtue?" demanded Steve.

Rube grinned broadly. "It's a modern age."

"I give up." Steve looked at Martin's frowning face. "What are you all tied up in knots for, Marty? Can't you see it either?"

"Father White said the subject of your particular examen should be something directed against your 'predominating passion.' I thought it over and I can't make up my mind. What *is* my predominating passion?"

"Sleep," retorted Steve promptly.

Martin thought a moment. "That's not a passion."

Steve turned to the others. "See, that's what I mean. It will start you fighting with yourself all day long." He turned back to Martin. "It's something to start on. You're always the last one out of bed in the morning and you're dozing, off and on, during most of the study time after lunch."

"I guess you're right, Steve," Martin said thoughtfully. "Thanks."

The five of them set about keeping their particular examen books. Just to prove his good will, Steve tried it for a week, and then gave it up. One day he asked Martin as to his progress in eradicating the blight of sleep, and was dispiritedly informed that the weekly totals showed he was "batting a thousand—for the other team!"

## Chapter 7

A HOLIDAY always keenly anticipated by the entire seminary was the Rector's Nameday. To the festive meals and the freedom from classes, there was added the attraction of a three-act drama presented by the Philosophers. Steve had been placed in charge of the production, and for weeks he and his fellow-workers slaved over scenery, costumes and rehearsals.

The eventful day at last arrived, shrouded in wintry weather. Throughout the morning, light flurries of snow kept sifting down from leaden grey skies, and a razor-edged wind whistled shrilly about the buildings.

Steve, searching for Martin, at last found him in the library. "Marty," he whispered.

Martin lifted an abstracted gaze from the book before him. "Huh?" he asked in the dreamy voice of a sleepwalker.

"Snap out of it. I've got to talk to you."

Martin closed his book, and stood up. They went out into the corridor. "I'm in a jam, Marty," abruptly announced Steve.

The dreaminess went out of Martin's face. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Steve punched the fist of one hand into the palm of the other several times, looking down embarrassedly at the floor



and then up again at Martin. "I don't want you to get the wrong idea about this, Marty," he finally said, "but, well, this is how it is. There's a little party planned for tonight, up in the attic."

Martin looked at him. "That's against the rules," came his blunt condemnation.

Steve reddened. "Ye gods! Don't you think I know that?" Irritation put an edge on his voice. "I didn't think that was going to bother you so much."

The brown eyes, very serious but alert now, met his frankly. "I don't get it, Steve. Ever since retreat you've been knocking yourself out toeing the line, and now, all of a sudden, you want to kick over the traces."

"I promised the fellows," burst out Steve. "They expect it of me. I promised them a spread, and I can't let them down; if I—"

"That's just human respect."

"Will you quit talking like the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, and listen to me?" demanded Steve.

"O.K., I'm listening."

"The fellows have been swell about putting on this show. Some of them have given up their recreation periods for three weeks, hand running, and never a bleat out of them. When they asked me to throw this little party I'd have been a dog in the manger to refuse. It's a dopey little thing, but it's what they want, and it's such a small return for all their sacrifices for the rest. You get the picture?"

"Yes." After a pause he looked up at him. "What's holding you back?"

"The gardener was supposed to bring the eats back from the city. He just phoned that he's not getting back till tomorrow."

"That really fouls up the works, doesn't it?" commiserated Martin.

"The fellows worked so hard, I hate to let them down."

Martin ran his hand up over the side of his head and down the back and finally let it come to rest on the back of his neck. He looked at Steve. "Look. I'll see Puff. He's always got ideas. We'll get the stuff somehow. Don't call it off."

"Where are you going to get it?"

"I don't know, but we'll get it. Don't worry."

The performance began at 4:00 o'clock. Inside the gaily decorated auditorium the community sat in festive comfort, while the orchestra played, the Glee Club sang, and the drama got under way.

Across the flat, windswept fields two muffled figures, heads down, ploughed valiantly into the teeth of a bleak northeaster. "You'll freeze to death in that sweater," said Puff, his face half buried in the collar of his stout mackinaw.

"I'm frozen already," chattered Martin. "I didn't think it would be this cold."

They came to a small stream. Some crude planking had been fashioned across it as a bridge, but a layer of ice had formed on both fringes of the stream and held the planking under water. The unfrozen center of the stream moved, like a sluggish black snake, between the snow-dusted borders of ice.

"Holy cats!" exclaimed Puff. "We're stuck. How are we going to get across?"

"There must be some way," said Martin. "How about that stake over there?"

A stout two-by-four had been driven into the bank of the stream for tying up boats. It was firmly frozen into the ice, and the upper portion projected at an angle over the open water.

"I think I can crawl out on it and jump across," ventured Puff.

"Will the ice on the other side hold you?"

"I'll try. If it holds me, it will hold you."

Puff crawled out on the stake and jumped across the open water. The ice cracked but held.

There were some young willows clustered about the stake, and, taking hold of one of them for support, Martin crawled out on the stake. He straightened up to jump, and lost his balance. His jump became an awkward plunge that turned him completely over in mid-air. With a loud splash he landed flat on his back in the inky black water.

At once Puff sprawled on his stomach, thrust his outstretched hand over the edge of the ice, caught Martin, and hauled him to safety.

"Je-Je-Jerusalem!" chattered Martin. "I'm wet!"

"Of all the dopey things!"

"I couldn't help it. That blasted willow! It folded up right under me."

Puff pulled the sweater off Martin's shoulders and threw it into the stream.

"Hey, you nut! That's the only sweater—"

"Shut up!" howled Puff. "Do you want to get pneumonia? Here." He threw his mackinaw about him. "Now run like blazes."

They began to run over the uneven, frozen ground. Time and again they stumbled and occasionally blundered prone as some jutting, hard clod tripped them, but at last they came to the village.

Puff swiftly completed his purchases and laden with crackers and candies and sardines they set forth.

The brief respite in the warmth of the store made the outside cold all the more difficult for Martin to bear. The wind was like a knife edge against his wet skin.

"We've got to take the road, Marty," decided Puff. "If we get caught, we get caught. Come on."

They jogged fifty paces and then walked fifty paces, and kept alternating this rhythm all the way. The snow, falling

steadily and heavily, covered the road, and it squeaked beneath their shoes like wet rubber. Gradually Martin forgot the discomfort of his wet clothing in the distress of laboring to keep up with Puff's lumbering speed.

At length he was forced to complain. "These darn pants are rubbing my legs like nutmeg scrapers."

"Are they frozen?"

"As hard as rocks," he gasped.

"Keep going. We'll soon be there," encouraged Puff.

It was late when they stole into the basement of the seminary. The bell was sounding the call for supper. "Just in time," exulted Puff.

"What do I do about these clothes?" gasped Martin.

"No time to change now. Pull on your cassock. It will cover up everything."

"That's what Father White said when he caught me wearing a dirty shirt—'The cassock covers a multitude of sins.'"

"Let's leave Father White's name out of this," requested Puff uncomfortably.

The seminarians were expansively convivial after the entertainment, and the meal was very gay. Martin alone seemed to be unhappy. The heat of the room gradually thawed his frozen clothing and he was acutely aware of the clamminess forming into drops and trickling down his legs. Dick noticed Martin's abstracted state. "What's wrong with you, Marty?" he asked. "You look as if you were sitting on a cake of ice."

Martin gave him a warning dig with his elbow. Across the table Mr. Wurmser had lifted his eyes to study the object of Dick's remark.

"Guess I had too much for lunch," mumbled Martin.

"I would say," remarked Mr. Wurmser, studying Martin's wind-reddened face, "that you had had too much cold air—outdoors."

"I would say," retorted Dick, his indignant glance transfixing Mr. Wurmser, "that there is too much *hot air*—indoors."

Mr. Wurmser bowed his head in humble acknowledgment of the rebuke.

"Charity, charity," admonished Mr. Wurmser gently.

"Charity begins at home," snapped Dick.

"Pipe down, Dick," urged Martin. "Pipe down, will you?"

The meal finally concluded, the seminarians stood up, faced towards the crucifix over the Prefect's table, and began to say their grace after meals. Chancing to glance downward, Dick was struck all of a heap to see a pool of water about Martin's chair. Utterly dumbfounded, he followed his friend from the dining room, and saw him take the stairs two at a time in the direction of the tower.

Martin rushed into his cubicle and began to strip off his wet clothing.

Dick burst in on him just as he peeled off his sodden trousers. He stared at him a moment. "Now what have you been up to?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Nothing my eye! You were sitting in a pool of water all during supper."

"I fell in the river."

Dick sat down, sudden comprehension making him weak. Distractedly he ran his hand over his carefully combed hair. "Marty, you are one hopeless pain in the neck," he announced. "Didn't the retreat do anything for you at all?"

"Man alive, Dick, you talk as though I liked doing this."

A corner of Dick's mouth tightened. "Don't tell me you pulled this stupid stunt out of a sense of duty."

"Well, Steve was in a jam," explained Martin. "He'd promised the fellows a spread. It didn't sound stupid then; and it doesn't right now. Not to me."

Dick struck the palm of his hand against his forehead. "Of all the bonehead plays you've pulled, Marty, this takes the prize! If Father White catches you it will put all of us on the spot. Didn't you think of that?"

"Quit thinking about your personal rating with Father White, will you? I did this, not you. You're in the clear. And anyhow, he won't catch me."

"You don't know him."

"How's he going to find out? No one knows about this except you, and me, and—the other fellow."

"Is that so? Wurmser had his suspicions, and that's as good as putting the affair on the teletype."

"He won't say anything. It sure feels good to have dry clothes on. Come on. Let's get to the recreation room before Father White starts checking."

At that precise moment, Father White was starting towards the recreation hall from the dining room. He had stayed on after supper supervising the seminarians who were carrying off the dishes. There had been reports of a great deal of breakage and he had lingered in the interests of preserving the crockery. He noticed Mr. Wurmser making exaggerated pauses and then wide sweeping evasions around some object on the floor. The Prefect sauntered over to the spot in question. There was a pool of brackish water on the floor. With great interest he studied it for a moment. "Who sits here?" he asked Mr. Wurmser.

"Mr. Manning, Father."

"Must have had an accident." His gaze fastened on the righteous countenance of Mr. Wurmser. "A few motions with a mop would eliminate this," he suggested.

Mr. Wurmser reddened and went after the mop. With ominous deliberateness Father White turned and made his way to the recreation room. He could tell river water when he saw it.

His gaze roved about and detected Martin playing checkers at a table. He sauntered over and looked at him and then at the cassock, which Martin had pulled up above his knees. Father White's fingers appraisingly pinched the cloth on the knee of the trousers. "Good material, Mr. Manning, good

material in those trousers," he observed. Martin's head jerked up. "But clerical decorum dictates you should not hike your cassock up in that manner in order to display them."

Martin hastily dropped the cassock over his knees. "I forgot, Father," he mumbled.

"You have quite a faculty for forgetting," came the quiet response as the Prefect moved away.

Martin's eyes followed him. How much did he know? Was he on to the whole affair? It certainly had been a good idea to change at once into dry clothes.

"Put your mind on the game, will you?" growled his opponent. "You're a push-over tonight."

"Kind of distracted I guess," agreed Martin. "He sort of upsets you."

"That's his job," assented the other. "He's the best upsetter in the business."

It was well past the time for lights out when Martin crept forth to join the assemblage in the attic. In spite of his apparent success in circumventing Father White a feeling of uneasiness stayed with him, but it gradually disappeared in the conviviality of the gathering.

There was a great deal of comment about the play, congratulations and good natured chaffing, while the foodstuffs rapidly disappeared. Suddenly a sharp warning hiss came from Puff who was stationed at the door. At once the flashlights snapped off. Puff's voice cut through the stillness in an urgent whisper. "Duck, fellows! Somebody's coming!"

Like quail they scattered, the four friends scurrying into their room, the rest of the seminarians fluttering fearsomely out of the other exit at the far end of the attic. Dick, Rube, Martin and Steve pulled off their bathrobes and, clad in their pajamas, jumped into bed. They had been prepared for just such an emergency.

Breathlessly they waited. The door creaked; the curtain rings about Steve's cubicle made a slight metallic noise, a flash-

light snapped on, and then Father White's hand came down on his shoulder. Steve gave a good performance. He grunted sleepily, sat up, yawned prodigiously. "Who—what—? Oh, good morning, Father. I didn't hear the bell."

"You will, tomorrow morning," promised Father White. "Come to my office right after breakfast, Mr. Kolesar."

He left as quietly as he had come. They heard the attic door close. Rube got up and made a pretense of going to the lavatory. He came back from his reconnaissance. "He's gone," he announced.

"I think we are, too," came Steve's dour voice. "I'm up on the carpet first thing tomorrow morning."

Somber stillness greeted this announcement, and then Dick began to pour forth urgent advice as to what Steve should say, the attitude he was to take in order to bluff his way through; but Steve quickly silenced him. "I'll handle the thing. Just leave the whole business to me."

There was something comforting about Steve's assurance. They knew him of old, a tower of strength; if he took charge, all was well.

Martin was the last to fall asleep. It was not the threat of the impending reckoning with Father White that delayed his slumbers. He felt sickish.

Steve entered the office prepared to safeguard the identity of his fellow culprits at all costs. With a long, quiet stare Father White gazed at him, and then gestured him to a chair. "I'm aware of what took place last night, Mr. Kolesar, and am concerned to know the reason for it."

"It was my idea," stated Steve sturdily. "If there's any punishment coming, I'll take it."

"You haven't answered my question—the reason?" persisted Father White patiently.

"It was for the fellows who were in the play," explained Steve. "They sacrificed a lot of free time. I thought they



should have some sort of reward, something extra. They get a big kick out of a thing like that."

"Evidently. But how did you get the supplies?"

"Supplies?" said Steve, feigning ignorance.

"Yes, the supplies. I don't imagine you were reciting the rosary up there in the attic."

"I'm sorry, Father. I can't tell you that."

"Involves someone else, eh?" Steve made no reply. Father White leaned forward, and there was a deep earnestness in his voice. "Mr. Kolesar, I am in serious need of your help in this matter. You see, I have to make a decision, and what you tell me may have an important bearing on it. I have a pretty strong suspicion, but one cannot act on that alone. I assure you you will be doing the party or parties concerned a service."

Steve looked at him a moment, and then abruptly blurted out the details of his conversation with Martin.

"Thank you, Mr. Kolesar. That was what I wished to know."

"Marty shouldn't have any blame for this, Father," urged Steve.

Father White adjusted his glasses and focused his gaze on his desk top. "We will drop the *entire* matter, Mr. Kolesar." He looked up at him. "Understand?"

"Yes, Father."

"I was greatly pleased at the fine performance the students put on yesterday—in the auditorium I mean—and I want you to prepare an entertainment for Christmas Day. Here are the programs of previous years to give you some ideas. Let me know as soon as you have any arrangements made."

"I sure will, Father, and thanks a lot."

"One thing more." The Prefect's uplifted hand kept Steve in his seat. "Let the other—er—banqueteers know that there is always place in the seminary for wholesome recreation and fun, but boarding school pranks and escapades are a thing of

the past. 'When I was a child . . . I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away the things of a child.' "

"Most of us feel kind of foolish about the whole affair already," confessed Steve, "but I'll tell them anyhow."

The bell sounded for study period and Steve made a hasty exit. Looks, freighted with apprehension and questioning, flashed at him as he entered the study hall. The grapevine had been at work. He grinned widely and held up the programs. The whispered news sped around the room, and a relieved sigh went up from many a heart.

Martin was too miserable to share in the general feeling of relief. His head was hot, he had chills, and he was coughing. All through the first part of the lecture on psychology he kept muffling the cough, but it persisted in breaking out repeatedly. Father Lallande was in the midst of a painstaking refutation of "psycho-physical parallelism," and found himself waging a war on two fronts: the empirical form of the theory as propounded by Professor Wundst of Leipzig, and the incessant hacking as produced by the bronchial tubes of Mr. Manning of New York. He stopped. "Well—Mr. Manning—you are coughing. You have a cold, no?"

"I guess so, Father."

"Please go to the infirmary and have it tended to."

Reluctantly Martin left the hall. One was supposed to notify the Prefect before going to the infirmary, but under the present circumstances he thought it wiser to disregard that little regulation. His mind was not exactly clear this morning, but he vaguely thought some cough drops should fix matters up.

Unfortunately, the Brother Infirmarian was an adept at his task. He could detect a malingerer with one glance, but was just as prompt to diagnose a real illness.

"Cough drops!" he exclaimed. "Hah! Open your mouth." He popped a thermometer into it, and took hold of Martin's wrist. After a minute, he withdrew the thermometer, looked

at it and then at Martin. "How long have you had this cold?"

"Since this morning, Brother."

"Go get your pajamas."

"Man alive, Brother," protested Martin weakly, "it's just a cough. If I could have some cough drops—" The floor waved drunkenly beneath him, and the room abruptly darkened.

Martin awakened in bed. The walls were wondrously white, and his head was splitting with a tremendous ache. He was hot all over. At his side loomed a familiar bespectacled face.

"I—I thought the permission, Father—" he began. A cool hand closed about his wrist, and he forgot what else he wanted to say.

Martin was a rather sick young man for several days, but the solicitous care of the Brother soon brought him back to normal health. He never forgot the conclusion of the incident, that eventful day when Father White entered the room, stood at his bedside, and asked very abruptly, "Did you ever hear of Kneipp?"

"Kneipp? No, Father."

"He wrote a book."

"Is it on psychology?"

"No."

"What is the title, Father?"

"*My Water Cure*. You should read it sometime."

Martin blushed, and the confession of his folly rose to his lips, but Father White forestalled it. "Mr. Manning, do you know what is the most important thing in judging of a person's actions?"

"No, Father."

"The motive, the motive. Everyone of us does a lot of stupid things, wrong things. 'To err is human.' As long as there is no malice in the motive, there is hope that we will straighten out again."

Martin understood now why Dick thought so much of the Prefect.

## *Chapter 8*

**A**T the start of the second semester, in early February, a spell of biting bitter cold closed down on the countryside. Each morning, when the boys rose, the world outside was dead in frost-locked darkness, and it was shrouded away in night when they went to bed. In between those two dark borders there was a brief segment of day, a wanly lighted little stretch of study, prayer and meager recreation that made up the sum total of their living.

Dick alone of the five had availed himself of the two weeks' vacation between terms. For two memorable weeks the seminary had been forgotten. Exciting days they had been, free of all duty and routine. For two full weeks he had been in the world, had been a part of it; for two full weeks he had lived.

Back here in the seminary again, the world was shut out, forgotten, and reality existed only in the life of thought that opened up from textbook and professorial pronouncements. With unhurried tread the serried ranks of thesis, proof and corollary marched on through the mazes of logic, epistemology and ontology. Awesome figures were introduced to him—Kant and Descartes, James, Spencer, Huxley—the shallowness or profundity of their thought held up to him, evaluated, analyzed, refuted or accepted.

Each week there was a quiz; each month an oral and written

examination. It was the life of the intellect that he was leading, and everything was directed towards its development: the silence, the food, the recreation periods. Health must be maintained, and so sports, games, conversation were to be used in their proper places, not as pursuits in themselves but as aids in the main pursuit.

And yet it was not a sterile intellectualism that was aimed at. The day began in the church and it ended there, too. In the shadowy stillness before dawn, Dick found his way down the chill corridors to the church. There were dignity and power in the lines of the edifice, but they failed now to send his spirit upwards as they had in the months past. The barrel arches of the Romanesque construction always created in him an impression of strength, but, with a slowly growing uneasiness, he felt it to be a strength that hemmed him in with immovableness, a strength that would not brook a turning aside to softer things, to weaker ways, to human loves.

The church seemed always chill, and Dick would sit in the oaken pew, burrowing his hands into the sleeves of his cassock like a Chinese mandarin, while his ears were attuned for the first sounds of the steam racketing into the radiators. Darkness clung deeply in transept and apse, only the red lamp before the tabernacle throwing a fitful glare about the sanctuary. His thoughts were giving him a great deal of trouble since his return. They would hop, jump and skip away with appalling irrelevance, making his studies difficult and meditation impossible.

The flame of the sanctuary lamp flickered crazily in some vagrant eddy of air. It was a ruby tongue of flame licking out at the darkness, thinning out at its apex, curved, like the crimson edge of a girl's lips . . . Ruby had been a lot of fun. Strange, how awkward he had been at first in her presence! He had never been that way with any girl before; but they had quickly found the old footing. The shows, dances, and parties had made up for the dry months past. His mother had worried

about his running around so much, and his older brother had made some edged remarks. A lot he knew about it! *He* had never been in a seminary.

The seminarians were straggling into their places. He watched for his friends. Steve came striding in, took his place in a pew, and kept rocking back and forth from one knee to another, as though this settling down had stopped him from where he was going and he was chafed and fretted by it. Rube scurried in like some gnome, the shoulders of his cassock all lumped up about his ears with the multiplicity of pull-overs and sweaters he was wearing underneath it. Joe reverently paced up the aisle, sat down at once, folded his arms, and then bent slightly forward. But it wasn't reverence that made him go slow and that caused him to bend forward. It was miserableness. The cold and the early rising were a great drag on Joe's frail constitution. Dick knew that, for Joe had told him.

Martin was always the last to arrive. He was never late, but early rising was still a daily struggle for him.

The lights went up in the church, disclosing the solid lines of black-garbed figures. They were all different, yet all the same. The cassock acted as a great leveler; there was no surface individuality left. That was one of the changes this strange way of living wrought.

Dick himself had changed; he was aware of that. The silence, the studies, the hours of prayer had woven a chrysalis about his inner self, and out of it had emerged a shining, new creature. Its very existence seemed to be a direct challenge to the outside world. That was why the first days at home had been so awkward. His life had become an ordered one, with every hour and action and thought thrown into purposefulness by the force of the new being that ruled him. Time had become a precious thing, and to squander it on sense excitement had set up immediate resistance within him. For this new creature, in the clear cold light of its purposefulness, saw all such frivolities as a criminal waste.

From past experiences he knew the emptiness that followed any yielding to pleasures, and he had tasted, too, the serenity that went with the wider way of living. In his mind there was no question as to which was the higher and truer form of life, but still he remained a human being and not an insensate machine. Others had pointed out to him that his attitude had in it something of the wide-eyed enthusiasm of the adolescent, the first fervor of a neophyte walking blindly the cloud-wrapped hills of unreality. He was not such an extremist that he could not see the grain of wheat in the chaff of their opinions. The loftiness of one's ideals did need a leavening touch. One had to go at times among people and share with them their simple ways of relaxation. He had always known that. Even Moses had eventually come down from the mountain. Everyone had to have a break. Balance was needed in any and every aspect of life.

Looking at his friends, Dick felt stirring within him something vaguely akin to pity. They were bogged down in a mechanical adherence to routine. His absence had given him perspective about them. After the wise-cracking familiarities of his vacation acquaintances he found the conversation of his four friends singularly stodgy. He detected in them a mole-like absorption in observing small rules. At the oddest times they would steal away for hidden moments in the chapel. Not that these things were not right and good, but his friends seemed to consider them the be-all and end-all of existence. They had not as yet come to the realization that one could be devoted to one's ideals and still have room for the little human joys. After all it was just these little human joys that made life livable and that rounded out one's character. It made of one a complete person.

He had not ventured to tell them this, for it would have entailed the disclosure of how he had spent his vacation. Their judgment, he knew, would be immediate and sharp, and it would be useless for him to attempt to withstand the force of

their united condemnation. What he had discovered was an intimate, personal thing. Each of them must come to it by his own efforts or not at all. They, on their part, had sensed beneath Dick's casual report on his vacation a secretiveness, an absence of his former confiding candor, and it had caused a strangeness to come between them.

Joe alone was exempt from this. A bond of sympathy had developed between him and Dick, for they spent much of their recreation periods together. Ostensibly, they were striving to acquire a working knowledge of conversational French, but actually it was because they found in each other a readiness to relive the happy memories of the past.

They spoke of the good times they had had, the fun of parties, the excitement of games. But when it was all told there remained only a vast discontent within them, and once, when Dick broke the brooding silence, the tone of his voice had become flat and empty. "I guess that's all over and done with," he said decidedly.

"Yeah. That's out."

"Unless you quit," said Dick somberly.

"An ex-seminarian?" Joe's voice was rather grim. "You know how people look on that. It's as if you had served time in Sing-Sing."

"That's right," agreed Dick. "Remember that girl, Anna—Anna something or other? She came back from a convent and everyone looked at her cockeyed. I did, too. I don't know why. She was just trying it out, just like we're doing now. There's nothing terrible in not being able to make it, is there?"

"It's funny, isn't it? A fellow studies to be a doctor and gives it up. That's O.K. But when it comes to the priesthood, which is tougher, they all think there's something radically wrong with him if he quits."

"Are you thinking of quitting, Joe?"

"Me? Oh, no—shucks, no. It's just that I miss the good times."



"So do I."

"Dick, do you ever talk with the other fellows up in the tower about this?"

"No. They've all gotten kind of batty about keeping the rules."

They had rounded a bend in the walk and saw Father White walking towards them. "*Aujourd'hui il fait beau, n'est-ce pas?*" prattled Dick with immediate presence of mind.

"*Quel dommage, quel dommage,*" bumbled Joe.

"I'm in a Gallic mood today," greeted Father White. "Do you mind if I join you?"

"No, Father," said Dick in an unenthusiastic voice.

Father White's French rattled about their ears like a Gatling gun, and both of them were heartily glad when the half-hour was up. "It's a beautiful language," said Father White regretfully. They made no reply and his eyes twinkled. "But there's nothing like English after all, is there?"

"Amen," came Joe's soulful reply.

Father White laughed aloud. "The knights of old would not be pleased to hear your emphatic rejection of the language of chivalry, Mr. McBride."

Joe gave a sheepish smile, and Father White turned to Dick. "By the way, Mr. Whelan, could I see you in my office for a moment?"

"Right now, Father?"

"Yes; if you don't mind."

Dick followed the Prefect to his office. "We were just speaking of chivalry," observed Father White, "and it reminded me that I have here a letter from a damsel in distress." He picked up an opened letter from his desk. "A certain Ruby." He looked up at Dick's crimson countenance. "It would seem, Mr. Whelan, that you left a broken heart in the Bronx."

"I told her not to write," blurted out Dick.

"Hm. Is that an admission that you were engaged in, shall we say, extra-curricular activities during your vacation?"

"Oh, I just went out with her to a show once or twice, Father."

"The tone of her letter indicates a more intimate acquaintanceship than that." Dick was silent. "Be seated, Mr. Whelan."

Dick sat down, and Father White tossed the letter back on the desk, and then drew up his own chair. "You are faced with a decision, Mr. Whelan," he began easily, "and I want to assist you in making that decision by putting the state of the question clearly before you. I cannot make the decision, of course; that is your responsibility. As you have had explained to you, a life of celibacy is not the usual thing, but it is within the province of our decision to surrender a natural good for one of a higher order. That is what the priesthood demands of you. To be free for the exclusive service of others, the priest surrenders human love and all its attachments and pleasures."

"I know that, Father," replied Dick, fidgeting with his cincture. "That was the main reason I came here." His gaze suddenly lowered. "I used to run around quite a bit with girls before I came to the seminary. It was kind of fun, but—but it didn't really satisfy a fellow."

"I see," said Father White understandingly. "And the seminary offered you more?"

"Yes, I thought it did. During retreat I found out it really did." He ran his hand over his carefully brushed hair. "When I got home I sort of fell back into the old way of doing things. Sort of made up for lost time."

Father White's abstracted gaze remained fixed for a long time on the top of his desk. "That could have been the natural counter swing of the pendulum," he finally said.

His hand reached forward and picked up a letter opener. Carefully, he upended it, placing the tip against the desk's polished surface. "You know both sides of the matter now.

The important question is: Do you want to continue, or—" He released his hold on the letter opener and held up Ruby's missive—"do you want this?" His eyes held Dick's, gravely, searchingly. "You are free to choose, but choose you must, one way or the other. You cannot have your cake and eat it."

Dick stared at him in stunned amazement. It was an ultimatum, cold, clear, irrevocable, that was being offered him. His eyes dropped away from Father White's intent gaze. For months he had walked blamelessly the shining path of utter renunciation, and the only acknowledgment of it all was that at the first tiny indication of personal interest in another human being they wanted to expel him. Into his head flashed Joe's recent words about people's attitude towards an ex-seminarian. He had regarded Father White so highly, and here he was doing this to him. A bitterness choked up in him. It was unfair, inhuman and unnecessary, for there was no question in his mind and surely not in Father White's about what he desired. "I want to continue, Father," he said, and his voice was rather low.

"Very well." Father White crumpled the letter and threw it into the basket. "Write the young lady a note informing her that any further correspondence will be disregarded. Merely that." He reached forward again for the letter opener. "There's a line from St. Paul that I wish you'd keep in mind, Mr. Whelan: 'For every high priest taken from among men is appointed *for men* in the things pertaining to God.' That's the reason why a priest is ordained—not for himself, but *for men*, for others. I know this decision you just made was not easy, but you're trying for a big thing, and it takes a big heart, plenty of courage, and complete elimination of self." He studied the set face opposite him. "You know where to get help when you need it."

Dick's eyes came up inquiringly to Father White's face. The Prefect turned his head slowly, invitingly aside, and

Dick's gaze, following it, came to rest upon the crucifix suspended on the wall.

"Yes, Father, I know."

Father White stood up, came around the desk and placed his hand on Dick's shoulder. "This is not a unique experience you are having, my boy. Others have gone through it, too. 'Through the rough ways to the stars.'" He quoted the last line in Latin, and then, smiling encouragingly, he opened the door.

Joe was waiting for Dick, and the sight of his friend's face was anything but reassuring. "What did he want, Dick?" Dick strode moodily along. "You haven't done anything, have you?"

"No, of course not."

"What's wrong then?"

"Some dumb cluck of a girl that I took to a show wrote me a letter," blurted out Dick.

"Ye gods! What nitwit did that?"

"Ruby."

"Oh. She would." They walked in silence for a while.

"It didn't mean a thing to me, Joe," confided Dick. "It was just—just a break, that was all."

"Of course it was. Father White didn't get tough about it, did he?"

"As tough as I ever want to see him. Gave me an ultimatum: either—or."

"You broke the rule, Dick, but—"

"Of course, I did, but I can't be perfect all at once. I want to be a priest. What else did I come here for? Ever since retreat I've been working at it, too—and hard. You'd think he'd not make one little thing like this a—a matter of life and death."

"It's his job, Dick," excused Joe.

"I know, I know," admitted Dick, "but he didn't have to be so grim about it."

"Well," said Joe placatingly, "what are you going to do about it, Dick?"

"Watch my step, of course. What else can I do?"

Joe shot a quick look of astonishment at him. "Aren't you going to break off with her—with Ruby?"

Dick's voice was irritable. "Of course, I am. She doesn't mean anything to me. Do you think I would have come back if she did? This means more to me than any girl."

## *Chapter 9*

MARCH 7th, the feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Patron of the Schools, was always a celebration with a profoundly intellectual cast. The high light of the day's festivities was a scholastic discussion carried on in Latin. There would be one thesis advanced by an honor student of the philosophy department, and another by a student from the theology course.

To Dick fell the great honor of handling the philosophic discussion. The proposition assigned to him was that: "The Imagination and the Active Intellect produce, as a Prerequisite of Intellection, a Conceptual Determinant of the Understanding." After explaining the proposition, he would have to defend it from attack by both professors and students.

The unpleasantness that had resulted from the discovery of his misbehavior during the vacation was speedily forgotten. For weeks he walked in a maze of studiousness. All the old textbooks and philosophers were probed, stock objections were studied and the refutations memorized, then the Moderns were perused, their attitude on the proposition analyzed, their words of wisdom noted down and learned by heart.

Dick made a brilliant showing. He heard the arguments of his opponents, distinguished clearly and sub-distinguished precisely. He denied and asserted. With devastating skill he

demolished the arguments presented. Steve rose up with what he thought a cogent piece of reasoning, and was disconcertingly dismissed with the blunt demonstration that his argument was a sophism.

Father Lallande was manifestly pleased at Dick's performance, and his classmates proud that he had represented them with such distinction. For several days Dick walked on air.

But it was merely a brief interlude in the monotony of his days. In a series of dreary, rain-filled days, Lent arrived, and with it Dick's pre-eminence became something that only he cherished. The attention of all the others was elsewhere. Ash Wednesday, the first day of the penitential season, brought home to them with blunt realism that life was a brief affair. If they were going to do the works of light they had better work while there was day. It was a contradiction for them to be comfort-loving followers of a thorn-crowned King.

With the hardihood of inexperienced youth they embarked wholeheartedly on various mortifications and particularly on rigid fasting. They took but one full meal a day; breakfast was a mere cup of coffee and one slice of bread; at midday they carefully gauged the quantity of food so that it did not exceed ten ounces.

It was at lunch on Monday, during the second week of Lent, that Steve noticed Martin helping himself to food with unmortified abandon. He met him outside at recreation.

"You went way over your ten ounces at lunch," remarked Steve.

"I know. I'm not fasting anymore," replied Martin.

"What's the matter? Can't you take it?"

"No. I get the awfullest headaches in the middle of the morning," confessed Martin rather shamefacedly.

"Cream puff! If you can't do even that little bit, you'll make a fine leader for the people, you will. You'll be the kind that preaches: 'Do as I say, but don't do as I do.'"

"Well, for the love of Pete! I'm not built like you."

Dick's face had stiffened into a hostile mask. The words which Steve had spoken were to him an echo of that unbending attitude he had encountered in Father White, that ruthless adherence to a principle that eliminated any and all consideration of self. He had not been able to speak out his mind then, but here he could. "Marty's right," he declared in a brittle voice. "A ten-ton tank like you can handle the fasting easier than the rest of us."

"Phooey!" jeered Steve. "The bigger you are the more nourishment you need."

"That's your idea," countered Dick coldly.

"My director told me," explained Martin, "that studies and health come first. If the fasting interferes with the studies, knock off."

Joe's countenance smoothed out in a satisfied smile. "That sounds like what I needed to hear. I'm going to get permission to do the same. About the middle of the morning my stomach makes so much noise I can't think."

"After all, first things first," observed Dick pontifically.

"So what?" demanded Steve.

"*Atqui*, studies precede fasting; *ergo*, drop fasting."

"Ye gods!" stormed Steve. "Syllogisms! Is that what you're going to stuff the people with? Fasting is a law of the Church. It's canon law."

"It's canon law, too, that dispensations are allowed," retorted Dick sharply.

"You'll start teaching them the law by the exceptions, huh? A fat chance that they will follow that kind of leadership," said Steve heatedly.

"Aw, go sit on a tack, Steve," said Rube disgustedly. "You've got a Napoleon complex."

"Napoleon! If a guy tries to do what's right, then he's Napoleon," said Steve bitterly.

Dick gave him an unpitiful glance. "Just because the rest



of us don't want to starve ourselves is no reason for you to go jumping down our throats."

"It's the law of the Church," maintained Steve.

"Oh, go on," jibed Joe. "You're more Catholic than the Church."

"Sounds like Jansenism to me," put in Dick coolly.

The hot blood of Steve's ancient Slavic forebears boiled over at this insult to his Catholicism. "Jansenism! I'm as good a Catholic as you are, any day, and there were more Catholics in my family than in yours."

"For the love of Mike, Steve," cut in Martin, "why start climbing your family tree? Who started this argument anyhow?"

"Napoleon's stomach," said Dick. They all turned to stare at him, there was such heavy contempt in the way he had spoken.

"I ought to sock you one for that," replied Steve threateningly.

Martin took hold of his arm. "Come on, Steve, break it up."

Steve allowed himself to be led away by Martin, but his anger did not quiet down at once.

"Dick's getting too big for his breeches," he growled. "Ever since that Saint Thomas Day celebration he's got a superiority complex. He thinks he's Plato, Aristotle and Saint Thomas rolled into one."

"It isn't that, Steve, and you know it. Something's been bothering Dick ever since he got back from vacation. You noticed it yourself."

"You're on his side."

Martin gave him a quick look. "Our side, Steve. All five of us, remember? It was always that way."

Steve was silent for a moment. "Things are changing, Martin, or maybe we are."

"Oh, no, they aren't. That fasting has put an edge on your

temper, that's all. It was doing that to me. I was getting as crabby as all get out. That's why I had to quit."

"Maybe with you, not with me. I can take it."

Martin looked at Steve's sturdy frame. "I know you can, Steve, but you shouldn't have rubbed it into us because we couldn't."

"Ye gods, Martin, if you can't take it you've got to learn how. You won't make the grade otherwise. Priests aren't made of wishy-washy stuff."

"I know that, Steve. I'm not asleep all the time. I did give it a try. Give me credit for that, can't you?"

"You ought to have stuck with it longer."

Martin smiled ruefully. "The spirit was willing, Steve, but I guess the old carcass was too weak."

## *Chapter 10*

**S**PRING came in slowly. It thawed, and the campus and the park were transformed into unsightly blotches of mud. A cold spell tightened up things for a while, and then another warm spell made muddy ribbons of the walks again. The weeks of rain seemed unendingly long and the intermittent hours of sunshine fleetingly brief. Insidiously the solvent rains of spring were doing their work, loosening the fetters of ice that cased the hearts of seedlings and held in bondage the resurgent sap.

It was dull weather for Dick. The bleak sameness of the days transformed the calm routine of study into a grating treadmill. There were no outdoor activities to break the monotony—only dull tramping around the park in muddied rubbers, beneath drab, leafless trees, past smeared and lifeless lawns. He came to know the wrinkled contour of the bark on each particular tree and the shape and branching of all the bushes. And all the while a restlessness was at work within him, a leaven of discontent.

He had given his decision to Father White and he was abiding by it, but the fine glow that had formerly hovered over all his work and prayer was gone. Regretfully, he found himself thinking back to those months after the retreat. Everything had been in focus then, the absorption of a great love

had held him, the sureness of a great truth had led him, and the permanence of a great peace had pervaded all his living. What was this bitterness that had insidiously stolen away his great contentment? Pique, because of Father White's incisive treatment? That had speedily evaporated in the more considered realization that Father White did not make mountains out of molehills. It was rather a growing realization of what his decision had meant, and with it a dim fear of reality. If Father White's appraisal had been correct then the oneness of a great love demanded the exclusion of all else, and that made of life a grim, grey routine. He wanted, deeply and earnestly he wanted, the sweep, the greatness, the immortality of such an absorbing love; but there remained in him some tendril of desire that clung despairingly to the warmth and companionship, the tangibility of earthly loves. To cut that away would have made of the future but a vast abstraction, an utter emptiness.

Holy Week came and the impressiveness of the liturgy, for the time being, absorbed his thoughts. The dull days were no drawback but rather an aid to the solemnity of the sacred services. In the evening he sat in the dimly lit chapel, and his heart was moved by the solemnity of the *Tenebrae*, the age-old lamentations of the ancient prophets keening away into silence as candle after candle was extinguished. The symbolism of the rites took on new meaning, for his months of study and meditation had prepared him for a deeper understanding, and the silence and aloneness had bred in him a strange receptivity.

And yet, strangely enough, of all the memorable services of this week, the one that was to remain longest in Dick's memory was the subdued little devotion on Good Friday evening.

Flower-filled vases had been placed before the *Pieta* on a side altar. There was perfection of form in the white beauty of the sculpt figures, the flowing lines of the Mother drooping dolorously about the dead Body on her knees. Intently he

gazed upon the sorrowing Mother, and the naked lifelessness of the Child to whom she had given life. In his own mood of discontent and darkness their tragedy of love and loss seemed to hold some intimate personal significance for him.

A priest stepped into the pulpit, and, in hushed tones, told of the grief of this Mother who had borne one Child, a Priest, who was the prototype of all priests. He spoke of a love that had died so love might live; and his words rose and fell, passing down the serried lines of listeners and floating upwards to be lost in the hollowing nooks and crannies of the transept and galleries. The sound of his speaking died away into silence. The pulpit was empty.

Softly, so softly that they seemed far-distant and away, voices rose in gentle song:

Stabat Mater dolorosa,  
Juxta crucem lacrimosa  
Dum pendebat Filius.

(At the cross her station keeping,  
Stood the mournful Mother weeping  
Close to Jesus to the last.)

The smooth-flowing rhymes transported Dick into another land, another age, another dimension. Over him stole a sensation of exquisite sweetness and sadness, of haunting sorrow, of unutterable woe.

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
All His bitter anguish bearing,  
Now at length the sword had pass'd.

Oh, how sad and sore distress'd  
Was that Mother, highly blest  
Of the sole-begotten One! . . .

Is there one who would not weep?  
Whelm'd in miseries so deep  
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Can the human heart refrain  
From partaking in her pain,  
In that Mother's pain untold?

A gust of emotion choked up in him. It was as though he were the figure there on that Mother's lap. It was as though he had died and everything was over—the blue of the sky, the swaying of the breeze, the sparkling sunlight. All of it was ended for him. No more the gay exchange of conversation, the lilt of laughter from the lips of a girl. He was filled with rebellion and bitterness, because he was so young, so talented, and now he was dead; because for him there was nothing more remaining but this—the languishing lap of a sorrow-filled Mother. In the excess of his self-pity he wanted to cry, and yet no tears came, for somewhere deep within him there flickered the awareness of actuality. He was not dead. Life still stretched out before him. There were laughter and lightness and love, and they were his if he but put forth his hand to pluck them.

Oh thou Mother! fount of love!  
Touch my spirit from above;  
Make my heart with thine to grieve.

He bowed his head for he was on holy ground, in the presence of a sorrow beyond all sorrow. And yet, even as commiseration flooded through him, there was mingled with it an insistent repudiation. Abruptly he glimpsed the entirety of the truth: Love died, that love might live. This was what was asked of him. A surrender of human love for a divine.

A sickness, a sadness, a trembling fear seemed suddenly to have gathered about the very core of his being. For even

though he saw clearly beyond sorrow to its resultant joys, he could vision as clearly the way he must walk to reach them. It was a bitterly hard and barrenly cold way. He shut the eyes of his mind and turned away his will from it.

The singing died down to a hushed conclusion, and Dick rose up and left the church.

## Chapter 11

**D**URING Easter week the weather broke fair and bright. The sun dried up the sodden fields and muddied pathways, and soon were heard the shrill cries of play from baseball field and tennis courts. Most of the seminarians entered enthusiastically into the games, but for Dick they seemed to have lost all their former attraction. He preferred to slip away into the woods and idle about by himself. With relish he savored the sunlight dappling the young turf, the feel of the air lazy with the ineffable touch of spring, the swift, eager sound of bird song flashing through the trees. He lingered long at the edge of the woodland, gazing at the fields where the plows were shearing up the loam, laying back the rich black folds of fecund earth. All life was again a-tiptoe.

But deep within him a vague unrest persisted, and he could find no assuagement for it. For all this beauty and freshness upon which he gazed cried out for someone to share it with, and there was only one with whom he wished to share it.

One Thursday he approached Martin and asked that he go with him on a hike.

"I'd like to go, Dick," said Martin regretfully, "but I've promised Steve to help him put up a new backstop on the tennis court. Can't you get someone else?"

"No," came the curt reply.



Martin looked at him in surprise. "How come?"

"I've got to have someone I can trust." The look of surprise deepened on Martin's face. "I want to send off a letter."

"A letter? I don't get it."

"Don't be a moron all your life," replied Dick irritably. "I don't want Father White to see it."

Martin was silent. He knew from Joe about the letter which Dick had received from Ruby, and about Father White's talk with Dick. His eyes studied the face of his friend. "I thought that was over and done with, Dick."

Dick's eyes narrowed slightly. "What's the matter? Cold feet?"

"You know differently," came Martin's unruffled response. "You're not being square with Father White. He gave you a break on that deal."

Dick was silent for he recognized the truth of Martin's words. Looking back on what Father White had told him, and considering what he now intended to do there came over him an uneasy feeling that the Prefect may have understood him better than he himself did. But there was no gainsaying this loneliness within him, this need that could not be assuaged any other way. He felt a shame in himself about it, for it warred with what he prized most and it would not be put down. He jerked up his head. "Do you or don't you come with me?"

"I don't."

"What a pal! I thought we always stuck together."

Martin stared at him. His voice suddenly was very deliberate. "Have I ever let you down, Dick?"

"You're doing it now."

"I'm not. I'm trying to be a friend. What you want to do is wrong."

"O.K. Skip it."

Dick turned abruptly and left him. Martin's blunt speaking had only made firmer his resolve to do what he wanted. An-

other seminarian proved more tractable, and Dick sent off his letter. It was the start of what soon became a weekly event. Outwardly, it produced little change in him, but a listlessness invaded his hours of study, and lecture periods gradually grew to be insufferably boring.

Steve and Joe overtook him in the monthly gradings, and Steve could not restrain his satisfaction. "A front-stretch runner," he said to Martin. "That's all Dick is."

"Go on, he can beat the rest of us any day," put in Martin loyally. "He eased up to give you fellows a chance."

"Oh, yeah? Any time Dick gets generous like that I'd like to know about it."

The days burgeoned out into summer, the trees put on full foliage, the grass greened lushly, the scents of flowers and the songs of birds wove into an Elysium of dreamy golden warmth. And gradually there was borne in on the mind of all the students that cosmic truth, which comes as surely to the inner depths of the seminary as the migration period does to the bird—vacation time was at hand.

Puff seemed to be the first upon whom that fact registered, and jubilantly he confided his discovery to Dick: "Thirty days till vacation."

It was in the nature of a revelation, and at once the news sped to all corners of the small seminary world. Abruptly, life took on tone and meaning; everything was fraught with interest and excitement. Even the shattering announcement of the final examinations was taken in stride. But when the professors began outlining the material to be mastered, dismay smote more than one breast. One year of philosophy embraced an enormous amount of material. They crammed and crammed, they outlined and memorized, they devised plans to simplify their studies, they gave up games at recreation and walked about, tutoring each other.

Eventually the days of wrath and judgment appeared. For hours they sat in the lecture hall chewing on their pens, wor-

rying over their examination papers. The ensuing days saw them marching into the halls of inquisition to sit before stern-visaged professors, who shot questions at them, tricked them with tangle-footed objections, burrowed into their meager fund of one year's knowledge to discover whether it was satisfactory, good or deficient.

The period of pressure evaporated, and, before they could give full expression to their relief, they were making another eight-day retreat. In it, instructions for the vacation time were given them. Each seminarian was to carry with him a form letter to his pastor, and at the conclusion of the vacation this letter had to be signed by the pastor and returned to the rector of the seminary. It constituted a certificate of good conduct during the vacation months, and it was the essential for re-admission to the next year of the seminary course.

The night before their departure for home Dick came into Martin's cubicle. Martin turned swiftly from his post at the window.

"Mooning again?" laughed Dick.

"Just watching the cars," whispered Martin.

"Boy, in two days we'll be where they're going," exulted Dick.

"Two days!" breathed Martin rapturously. "Two days!"

"Will I be glad!"

"What are you going to do this vac', Dick?"

Dick's folded arms were on the window sill, his chin resting lightly on them as he watched the lights of the cars flashing by. For a long time he did not answer, and when he did, his voice was strangely low, uninflected, as though he were pronouncing an ultimatum. "I'm going to have one rip-roaring good time. I can tell you that."

He had not meant the words for Martin. They were the words which he had not had the courage to say that afternoon in Father White's office. He would not forget that visit, for it was a deadly serious Father White that had spoken to him,

in a voice that was almost pleading. "I called you in, Mr. Whelan, because, frankly, I am concerned about you. Your class work has fallen off noticeably these past weeks, and I fear it's because your old trouble has cropped up again."

The Prefect was inviting his confidence, but Dick was not going to be finessed into any damaging admissions. He kept silent.

"Do you remember the letter you wrote when you applied for admission, Mr. Whelan?"

"Yes, Father. I remember."

"You had the right motive for coming here, and the spark of a great desire. Your letter showed that." The Prefect turned his spectacles from him to an abstracted study of the desk top. "A great love is not a matter of tremendous thrills and fine feelings. Love resides in the will, and the will is the source of action. Loving is doing. If you can't do great deeds now, you can do countless small ones. It takes a lot of small steps to climb a mountain. You come to a great love by many small loves." He looked up at him. "I'm trying to say that by many small acts of love you arrive eventually at a great love. Am I making myself clear?"

"Yes, Father, it's clear." It was; but that deep, impatient darkness within him was not assenting to any of it. He knew what those small loves meant; bleak days, drab duties, pica-yune sacrifices of comfort and companionship. The over-all peace and contentment, the sense of quietly growing towards some great consummation which they brought, he did indeed want. But he wanted, too, and just as urgently, this flood of desire within him to go out in a drowning tide of sensation, of fulfillment, electrifying every part of him, satisfying him fully, here and now and every minute of time that would be his.

"I think you had a glimpse of the truth during your first retreat, didn't you?" Father White's eyes were fixed searchingly on his.

His first retreat! *Greater love than this no one has...* "Yes," he replied. "I got the picture, the start of it anyhow, during that retreat, Father." He had, too. A love so absorbing, so chokingly great that it swallowed up life.

"Most people," continued the priest, "have had a vision of greatness and goodness, at some time or other in their lives. But both these things are impossible of attainment without a disregard of self. When forced to face that fact, they give up the vision. I don't want you to lose it. You must be on your guard in the vacation months that lie ahead."

He added some practical directions about prayer and avoidance of idleness, and when he had finished Dick mumbled some expressions of thanks and left.

But there had been a tinge of resentment mixed in with his gratitude. The Prefect's solicitude and kindly advice were based on a clear view of the way his inclinations were drawing him, and, after all these months, he needed no further illumination on that score. These grave counselings irked him, for they had the unpleasant faculty of setting up restraints within him at moments least desired, and he knew that were he to heed them they would hold him from the light-hearted joys he had visioned for the days of vacation.

"I wonder if we can get this same room when we get back," said Martin, looking about him with a look that was almost affectionate.

The fingers of Dick's hands clenched and his words rushed out in one taut command. "Don't start thinking about that, will you?"

Amazed, Martin looked at him. "Why?"

"It gives me the chills."

"Chills?" Martin stared at him uncomprehendingly.

Steve's voice, heavy and insistent, broke in on them. "Hey! Are you fellows going to gab *all* night? Go on and get in bed."

There was disillusionment in Dick's voice. "What a sour apple he's turned out to be."

Martin's brow wrinkled with perplexity. "Steve's not sour; he's just a bit more serious."

"Different from me, eh, Marty?"

Martin looked at him. "You can be serious enough if you want to, Dick."

"Haven't I been that long enough? Ten months!" His gaze was fastened on the distant darkness into which the taillights of the cars were disappearing. His voice fell to a whisper that held in it longing, desire and decision: "New York, here I come—"

The day of departure dawned, and farewells were said to all their professors and friends. The interurban brought them to the neighboring city, and after the silence of the seminary the noise of the city streets was confusing. Yet there was mingled with their confusion a sense of satisfaction as deep and comforting as the meeting with an old forgotten friend.

They made their way to the ticket window, and, in the face of the ticket seller's brisk efficiency, they found themselves unwontedly slow of speech and awkward. With clumsy fingers they fumbled out the money for their tickets. They re-checked their baggage. With hardly a word to each other they wandered into the waiting room. All about them flowed movement, talk and noise. The depot was a swirling current of sounds and sights, of footsteps and faces; and the pulse of its eddying movement matched the excitement of their mood. For even now the wheels of some trains were heaving those first sluggish revolutions that would quicken and quicken until they would send the train hurtling into lands beyond the horizon; and at the very same moment, the wheels of other trains were grinding their last wearied turns and coming to rest, the long dusty miles conquered, the traveling and tiring endeavor ended at last.

Quietly they sat there, on the straight-backed benches of the waiting room, a group apart, slightly bewildered but utterly content. The difficult months were over, and deep in the hearts of all of them was a sense of triumph and achievement. Ahead of them lay the thrill of home-coming, the joy of meeting the family and friends, and the delight of seeing again the old familiar streets and places. This moment would never be forgotten by any of them. The past months glowed softly in the background of their mood, a treasured memory, a kindly friend that had made possible the joy of this shining moment.

## Chapter 12

THE summer vacation was still in its early stages when Martin and Dick had a rather serious altercation. Their last night together in the seminary Dick had promised himself a good time during his stay at home. At the moment that had not had any particular significance for Martin. A good time was what he himself looked forward to, and for him, and all the rest of the seminarians, a good time had a definite meaning.

It was at a parish theatrical that Dick gave his first indication that a good time had another meaning for him. He and Dick had been recruited as scene shifters for the affair and they had accompanied Alice home the night of the dress rehearsal.

"You're really swell in that part, Alice," Dick had commended.

"Thanks, Dick," she smiled. "You used to be pretty good yourself. Why didn't you take a part?"

"I'm pretty busy," came the airy reply.

"If you have time to be shoving around scenery you could have handled a speaking part just as well."

"Oh, it's the memorizing that bothers me," he evaded.

"Oh? Haven't you got a good memory?"

"The best of any of us," cut in Martin. "He's giving you a lot of malarky, Alice. We're not supposed to take part in theatricals."



"Why not?"

"Seminary regulations."

"Oh, that seminary," she retorted petulantly. "Joe is always popping off about rules or something. Can't you forget them when you're on vacation?"

"Sure," laughed Dick. "Let's do just that." He slid his hand into hers. "How about some refreshments?"

They stopped at the Kandy Kitchen and over their ice cream sodas Martin asked about Joe. "What's Joe doing, Alice? I never see him anymore."

"Loafs around a lot. Eats about six times a day. Reads all the magazines and novels he can lay his hands on. You would think he had enough reading at the seminary."

"It's a different kind of reading," laughed Dick.

"Is your dad still set against Joe's going back?" asked Martin.

"Plenty."

They walked slowly homeward but stopped a block from Alice's home. "Better say good night here," cautioned Alice. "Dad would get angry if he saw you. You're a bad influence on Joe."

"But we're not seeing Joe, we're seeing you," said Dick.

Dick lingered a while making light conversation with Alice, and working around to the point he had in mind. Eventually he made a date to go with her to a movie the next Wednesday, and then they took leave of her.

They strolled silently down the street. Abruptly Marty spoke. "I thought it was Ruby."

Dick shot a quick look at him. "Ruby?" He stared at him a moment. There was reproach and accusation in his friend's eyes. "Oh—Ruby. She's out of the running. She moved. Didn't you know that? The week before vacation began, her people moved to some jerkwater town near Albany." He began to whistle softly, lingeringly. Martin recognized the song. "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now."

"You're putting Alice in a tight spot with that date," disapproved Martin. Dick stopped whistling and looked at him inquiringly. "She'll have to sneak out or tell a lie to her father. He wouldn't let her go out with you."

"What's the matter? Am I a leper?"

"You heard what she said. He doesn't want us around."

"Well, I'm not coming around. I'll not contaminate Joe."

"This is worse. If somebody sees you with Alice it might get back to the pastor and he will have to let them know about it at the seminary."

Dick laughed disagreeably. "Let them. Ye gods, you don't think a date with a girl is going to upset the system?"

"Man alive, Dick. You can't have your cake and eat it."

Dick's face went suddenly taut with hostility, and he bit off each word as though it were a sentence. "You sound like one of Creepy's Thursday evening sermons."

Martin reddened. "Shucks! I'm not preaching, Dick. I'm—I'm just interested—you know that."

"Yeah. In Alice!"

"Who, me?"

"You always were. You didn't have the gumption to ask her for a date and that's what's eating you now. Isn't that the truth?"

After a long silence Martin replied: "If I felt that way I'd never have gone to the seminary."

"You're just kidding yourself."

"No, I'm not," denied Martin his voice deadly serious; "but you are."

"Of course," agreed Dick, his lips curled with irony.

"You're not supposed to do this sort of thing, Dick, you know that."

"There were a million things you weren't supposed to do at the seminary and you did quite a few of them yourself. How about the time you left the grounds without permission?"

"That was different."

"Sure. It always is—when *you* do it."

Martin's face flushed. He clamped his lips hard to hold back the angry reply. With a quick nervous gesture he thrust back the lock of hair that had tumbled down over his brow. In hostile silence they walked the dark, deserted streets till they came to Martin's house. "I'm sorry I said that, Marty," said Dick, contritely. "I've been kind of standing on my head the last couple of months and I guess I'm not responsible for the things I break out with."

Martin put his hand on his friend's arm. "What is it, Dick? Do you want to quit?"

"No, I don't; but—but there's something that's pulling me in that direction." He looked up at Martin's puzzled face. "I guess I don't make sense. I'm like the middle of the week—two ways from Sunday. Maybe if I have a good time I can get the whole thing out of my system."

"That's not the right way to go about it, Dick," advised Marty.

"What is?" asked Dick despondently.

"You know the answer to that," replied Marty quietly.

"Yes, of course, I know," acknowledged Dick seriously, "and Father White refreshed my memory before I left. The only trouble is I can't do what he advised."

"Can't or won't, Dick?" Dick was silent. "Maybe you're afraid that his way would work," suggested Marty.

Dick gave an irritable shrug. "I've not gone into it that deeply. All I know is that I've been needing something that was not there at the seminary. It may be just a passing phase. Let me iron it out my own way. But you had better not say anything to the others about my having a date with Alice. It is just going to be this once, an exception, but you know how they are. They wouldn't understand."

"They wouldn't," agreed Martin, and there was a marked emphasis in the way he said it.

The wheels of the train rolled onward into the night; and the soulless, drumming monotony of their rolling filled the soul of Joe with a devastating sadness. It was the sadness that comes to everyone when joy has been drunk and only the empty cup abides, when carefree days are gone and only the shackles of work remain, it was the sadness that always comes when vacation ends.

Those ten weeks had filmed and faded like a dream. When he had re-entered his father's house it had been an emergence into a new world. The freedom to talk when and how he wished, to go in or out of the house as he pleased, to pick up a book, to sit at the window—there was delight in all these small things. He had felt stiff and awkward at first, but gradually he had been able to tell them about the restraints and industry of the shut-away existence he had led in the seminary.

His father had not said much, but both his mother and Alice seemed, intuitively, to realize all the things that he had sacrificed and his need to have them now. His favorite delicacies appeared on the table; they were continuously surprising him with quiet attentions; they were gentle and understanding of his moods. He grew closer to them; the ties of home tightened about him with a comforting feeling; and the loneliness that had been in him, by degrees, dropped away, in days which were bright with love and happiness.

Perhaps he should have gotten something to do, like the other fellows, a job to keep his mind from centering so much about the delights of home. For gradually there had appeared on the horizon of his untroubled existence a cloud, no bigger than a hand; at first, it was merely a dim threat, but daily, hourly, it grew in size and ominousness—the date of his return. It had obscured all the final days of the summer. His face darkened as he recalled the sudden breaking of the storm. His father came quietly into his room and sat down. "There's only a week left, son."

"Yes, I know."

"Are you going back?"

"I—I never intended not to."

"You don't look particularly happy about it."

"I don't like to leave mother and Alice and you," he confessed.

"Why should you?"

"I want to."

"Then why are you so gloomy about it?"

"I don't know. I—I guess I've had too good a time."

"Your time has been spent mostly at home. If your time has been so pleasant, then don't you think your place and happiness must be with us?"

"Don't make it harder than it is, dad. You've kept the fellows away from the house all summer. I've made my decision without them. I'm going back."

His father had lost his temper. Perhaps if he had kept on with his calm, placid pleading the outcome might have been different, for it had been hard to leave home, harder than the first time, because the bleak prospect of tiring regime, unremitting study, institutional meals, was known to him now. And he was going back to that, going back under his father's anger. Had he been truthful when he told his father he wanted to go? There was still in him this eagerness to stand out from the crowd, to scatter goodness and help about him as he went through life. There was so little to life. He bore in his own body the constant remembrance that it was such a brief thing and laden with suffering and disappointment. Yes, he wanted to go on with it, to forget his own physical failings and frustration in helping others—but the price of it all was heavy to pay.

The door of the compartment pushed open and Martin came in. Joe pulled himself upright.

"The other fellows are getting their berths made up, Joe,"

he announced. "They'll be along in a minute. You sure got a swell layout here."

Joe turned his face to the rushing darkness outside the window.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"Nothing. Just feeling kind of low," came the murmured reply.

Martin studied his face a moment. "I guess we all do."

"You see," explained Joe, "I was the only one who knew what was going on, and so, I guess, it's mostly my fault."

"Your fault? What do you mean?"

"Alice."

Martin sat back dazedly. "Alice? I don't see how she comes into this."

Joe looked up at him and then quickly averted his gaze. Alice had been piqued by Martin's steadfast inattentiveness, and, in an effort to arouse his interest, had taken up with Dick. Joe stole another glance at Martin. There was no mistaking the frank questioning in that face. As far as Alice's feelings for him were concerned, Marty was as dumb as the day he was born. It would be best to leave matters that way. "Dick's been dating her; two, three times a week for the past month," he finally said.

"Two, three times a week!" exclaimed Marty.

Joe kept his gaze lowered. "All of that. In fact whenever he got a chance."

"I knew about one date he had with her, but he said it was to be the only one, an exception. I didn't know about this."

"I did; that's why I said it's my fault." Joe's voice was bitter.

They sat in silence for some time, the minds of both of them reviving the recent memory of Steve bursting into the Pennsylvania Station—alone; their crowded questionings as to why he had not brought Dick and the stunned silence that had greeted his announcement that Dick was not going back. "He said he wouldn't chance asking the pastor to sign his

certificate of good conduct," Steve had explained. "He's been stepping out quite a bit and it was general gossip around the parish."

"But, ye gods," blurted out Rube, "just because a few old women want to talk—"

"It wasn't just that," Steve said. "Even if he got the O.K. he didn't want to go back. We had an argument. I talked myself blue in the face. It didn't do any good."

They had looked at each other dumbly, a vague indecision and sudden emptiness invading them. Steve had picked up his satchels. "I guess we go on without him," had been his firm announcement. Automatically they had followed him.

The clackety monotony of the train's wheels filled the compartment. Martin's gaze roved about the comfortable appointments of the room and came to rest on a handsome leather satchel in the corner. Joe was a pretty good person. In spite of being so much better fixed than the rest of them, the fate of a friend was his first concern. He was feeling this loss as deeply as any of them. Martin turned his gaze ruefully towards Joe. "I was working, Joe, slinging typewriters, trying to make some money, and I didn't know Dick was acting that way. Your dad made it clear that he didn't want us coming to your house. We never did get a chance to really have a talk together."

"I don't think it would have made much difference," came Joe's somber response. "If it hadn't been Alice it would have been someone else. That was the way Dick was made. He couldn't help it. But I'm sure going to miss him. Dick always kind of stuck close to me."

The door opened noisily and Rube and Steve entered the compartment.

"What's cooking?" asked Rube.

Martin looked critically at Rube's exuberant necktie and light suit. "You are—in those clothes."

"Kind of snazzy, eh? I'll change before we arrive."

"We were talking about Dick," announced Joe, and there was a rebuke in his voice.

"Oh," said Rube, and he sat down.

There was silence for a while. Back there in the station Steve's imperiousness had dictated their course of action for them, but the effect of Dick's defection upon their individual selves was still a matter of unfinished business. They had always stuck together. If one pulled out of an enterprise, they all pulled out. So it had been with the affairs of boyhood and youth. They knew that this was different. This was a bigger matter than mere loyalty to one another. And yet no one wanted to be the first to put his thoughts into words. Finally, Steve spoke: "He sure went about it in a funny way," he said. The eyes of the others turned towards him. "I mean letting everything go until the last minute, and then putting the whole job on me."

"He wrote that note you gave me," defended Joe.

"Yeah, but that was just to tell you what he had already done. He wasn't asking you about it," replied Steve.

"What do you mean, Steve?" asked Martin.

"He made his decision himself. We're not bound to stick by him."

Silence greeted his words. After a while Joe turned to Martin. "What do you think, Marty?"

"Well," replied Marty in a slow careful voice, "the Bishop told us the same thing, didn't he, when he first spoke to us about going to the seminary? He said each of us had to make his own decision."

"Then we don't have to bust up, do we?" put in Rube.

"Of course not," stated Steve authoritatively.

"We are bust up," maintained Joe stubbornly.

"Where do you get that idea?" asked Steve. "There are still the four of us."

"Sure there are, Joe," insisted Martin. "We've just got to stick closer together, that's all."



"Say, fellows," proposed Rube, "how about trying to keep our diggings in the tower and get Joe up there? That way we'll all be together."

"That place?" objected Joe. "You were always yapping that it was like an icebox."

"That was last year. This trip I've got ways to fix that," retorted Rube with a knowing look.

"Now what?" asked Martin.

"Well, fellows," announced Rube expansively, "it's like this." And he proceeded to tell them. He had brought along a small electric hot plate. The vision of hot chocolate of an evening took something of the chill off their spirits. Joe suddenly showed interest. "What did it cost you?" he asked.

Rube told him. "It was cheap at any price. Besides I've been working around that garage this vacation and did all right by myself. I bet I made as much money in one week as Marty made in two."

They compared wages and Martin regretfully admitted defeat. "I guess I'll have to learn how to be a mechanic," he ruefully admitted. "Slinging typewriters wasn't so hot. Both my hips are worn to a frazzle from hanging sixteen-inch Remingtons on them."

They talked long and ardently about their plans for convincing Father White to let them have their old place in the tower. Their minds leaped ahead to the anticipated meeting with classmates. They indulged in reminiscences and imitations of their professors. Good spirits were again in the ascendency.

The porter knocked on the door and informed them that they were disturbing the people in the adjoining bedroom. They went away then. Joe undressed and got into bed. The dirge of the rotating wheels filled the compartment with its rushing thunders. He snapped off the lights and raised the blind. Outside the window the night flowed past, a torrent of blackness with an occasional pin point of light from some

distant, lonely farmhouse. As the train plunged onward, the loneliness of loss rose up in him again. Things would never be the same again. The charmed circle was broken. Dick was gone, and, although the circle had drawn together and covered up the break, it would never be exactly the same; one part was missing and would always be missing.

Steve crawled into his lower berth but he did not fall asleep at once. His mind was busied with the problem of obtaining Father White's consent to their using the tower as their dormitory again. Joe, he decided, would be the best approach to use, his delicate health, their understanding of it, and their ability to take care of him.

"Steve, hey, Steve," came a hoarse whisper from the berth above. The dark green curtains billowed out, and Rube's face projected down into his line of vision.

"What is it?" asked Steve.

Silently Rube displayed his gaudy necktie and fervently kissed it. "I'm laying it away for the duration."

Steve grinned. "That's a break for the general public. You kind of bent the spirit of poverty when you bought that thing."

"It cost me two bucks. It's silk."

Rube withdrew behind the privacy of his curtain. He opened a small satchel and for a long time gloated over its contents. The electric hot plate was only one item. The rest of the satchel was filled with coils and springs and switches and wires. There was fascination here.

Martin threaded his way back through the crowded coach. He had been fortunate. The seat facing him was the only one unoccupied. He sat down and opened a box of eatables which his mother had prepared. Across the aisle, a tired young woman was trying to soothe the fretful child on her lap. Martin looked up and caught her staring at him. Vaguely he

smiled back at her. She rose to her feet and stepped across the aisle. "Could I buy that orange from you, sir?" she asked. "My little girl's sick, car sick. An orange is the only thing that helps her."

"Sure, sure," agreed Martin, thrusting the orange hastily towards her.

She placed the child on the unoccupied seat and opened her purse.

"I don't want any money," said Martin. "Just take it. I've got lots of stuff." He gestured at the box.

"Thank you," she said in a low voice, and placing the child on the empty seat she sat down beside her. Martin watched her as she swiftly peeled the orange and fed it to the child. Gradually the little girl's mewling sounds of misery died away and she slept.

Martin's gaze fastened on the little face. All the light had gone out of it and with the eyes closed it looked curiously like a sleeping doll. Her hair tumbled about the soft lines of the cheek in unconscious grace. Alice had dark hair like that.

"You don't mind her sleeping here, do you?"

Martin looked up and found the mother's anxious gaze fixed on him. "No, no, of course not. Let her sleep there." He pulled down his black topcoat from the rack overhead. "Here, put this over her. It's getting a little chilly."

She thanked him and carefully swathed the child in the coat. Her face was drawn with the weariness of caring for the child through the querulous hours of illness and dusty travel. "Is it all right if she stays here? I want to sleep a little, too."

"Go right ahead."

She crossed the aisle to her seat, wedged herself into it, and closed her eyes. Martin curled up on his seat. He thought of Dick, recalled their last meeting, the words that had been spoken, the words that should have been said. He thought that he had made it clear enough that he was just as much against

even one date with Alice as the others would have been. But Dick evidently had not or did not want to understand him. He had gone the way he had wanted to go. It had been his own responsibility. Yet the entire affair bothered him and left a feeling of guilt deep within him. The wheels of the train clacked monotonously onward, a dirge of reproachfulness. A worried frown settled on Martin's face as he drew up his feet under him. He fell asleep.

The train ground to a jolting stop and he opened his eyes to see if the child had awakened. A hand fell on his shoulder.

"Would you mind moving your kid so I can park my feet over there?" A pouchy-eyed man glowered down at him.

"She's not my kid," replied Martin to the new arrival.

"Whose is she?"

"Hers," Martin gestured to the mother across the aisle. "Don't wake her," he said, catching the man's arm. "Wait a minute." He got up, and, gently lifting the child's head, sat down in the seat which she had been occupying. He pillowed her head upon his lap. "Room enough now?"

"Yeah." The man sat down in Martin's seat and, stretching his legs across the intervening space, placed his feet on the seat alongside of Martin.

He shot a suspicious glance at his benefactor. The somber suit and black tie gave him the appearance of an undertaker, but he could not be that; too young for an undertaker. Must be some college kid coming back from a funeral; his eyes had that kind of knocked out look in them, and his mouth dragged down at the corners. Still you could never tell. It never paid to be careless when traveling. Casually, he reached in back of him and buttoned securely the pocket that held his wallet. He scrounged down then into his seat, and, tilting his hat forward on his face, settled himself for slumber.

The child stirred uneasily as the train bumped over a crossing, and Martin drew the coat closer about her.

## Chapter 13

FATHER LALLANDE, looking placidly about the lecture hall, noted the absence of several students. A ghost of a regretful smile hovered at the corners of his mouth. "There are some gaps in the ranks, I see—Mr. Whelan, Mr. Steiner, and yes, some others. The mills of the seminary grind slowly, but they grind very surely."

After this comforting statement, he cast his eyes downwards and studied his fingernails. His head came up. "'As the sun is the king and ruler in the kingdom of the visible world, so metaphysics is the queen in the realm of the sciences. The service of this queen is the most noble of services.' These are the words of Geyser in his *Metaphysik*. You will find the quotation on page 6."

With that introductory they were launched into the study of metaphysics. It was as abrupt as that. From the delights of home and the ordinary way of life they were plunged into the mole-like burrowings of thought that had busied the greatest intellects of the world. The light of day seemed to dim out and disappear as they entered the caverns of speculation into which these insistent minds had probed: the study of being, potential and actual being, the concepts of act and potentiality, essence, its existence and its properties, the divisions and cognition of essence, existence, its reality and its

relation to essence, the transcendental attributes of being, namely, unity, truth and goodness. Abstraction piled on abstraction, plumb-lined with logic, towering into syllogistic pyramids. Urraburu, Mercier, Suárez, Aquinas, James, Kleutgen, Maritain, Van der Aa, Alamannicus, McWilliams, and a host of others built for them their houses of thought. It taxed their minds to follow where these great intellects had walked so surely. It was a higher level of living, a rarefied atmosphere which was hard for ordinary mortals to breathe. But valiantly they struggled on, impatient at times in their youthful practicality of so much thin-edged speculation, and yet fair-minded enough to appreciate the keenness of intellect, the insistence of will with which these lovers of truth had launched their attack against the walls of mystery and darkness that ring the human race.

Martin had taken Dick's place as Joe's partner in conversation. They were both filled with eagerness to be profound metaphysicians, outstanding lights to guide mankind in its groping after the One, the Beautiful and the True. When the results of the first examination were published, Joe's marks placed him at the head of the list, but Martin was far down among the herd of the undistinguished. He was discouraged.

"Glory be, a fellow studies his head off and where does it get you?" he complained.

"You're doing too much outside reading, Marty," counseled Joe.

"What do you mean, too much outside reading?" retorted Martin. "How are you going to learn the stuff if you don't read what the other authors say about it?"

"The textbook has it all," replied Joe. "Learn that and you've got all you need."

"A parrot can get the stuff down pat."

Joe reddened. "I doubt it."

"Sorry, Joe. I wasn't trying to run you down. It's just that there's so much to learn and so little time to do it in."

"That's why we've got textbooks. Father Lallande explained that. These years are only to give us a start in the study of philosophy. There will be all the rest of your life to really get to the bottom of it."

"I know, Joe. I heard him say that. But, man alive, when you get outside in a parish when are you going to get time to study philosophy? If you don't get it down now you'll never do it."

Joe was silent for a moment, feeling, with Martin, the fine fervor of anticipated work. It was easy to visualize the busy existence that was to be theirs and the demands it would make on brain and patience and skill. They had to have all knowledge and all virtue to do their task adequately. "There's theology coming, too," said Martin. "Four years of it." He shook his head. "I guess we've just got to do the best we can."

They had a full schedule. Biology, liturgical and historical studies, as well as the Hebrew language, had been added to their curriculum. There were speech studies, too, and an introduction to the study of the Sacred Scriptures.

In spite of their incessant industry, they found themselves in the midst of a great quiet, a great peace. For Marty the days marched on with the sureness, the inevitableness of waves riding into the shore. Each of them was a fulfilled destiny, a full account of duties performed. Each day opened with prayer, each day closed with prayer; and it was this that made the seminary a world apart. During the days of work this past summer, he had seen for the first time how the outside world really functioned. Its entire activity revolved about self. All the days of the week were a scramble of work that seemed to have only one objective—the weekly pay check. Here the world revolved about an invisible center, and all the months of work became a center-seeking activity. And that center was real and deep and quiet.

By slow steps he began to feel himself being drawn inward into a tranquility that was as restful and loving as the presence

of a friend. He thought but rarely of the city and outside events. It was only at morning and evening prayer that he remembered his parents and the friends at home. He knew that he was changing, that he was losing something that had made up the Martin of old. His thoughts went along different lines. His former freedom of thought and action was being lost and yet it was not lost. Somehow he felt richer, more individual than ever before.

It was a strangely satisfying experience, for each surrender of self brought with it a sense of fulfillment. There were times when he wanted to talk about it with his friends. He imagined that they, too, were going through the same experience as he, but that they felt, as he did, a reluctance to speak about it to others. And somehow he did not want to be the first to speak of it. Patiently he waited for one of them to broach the subject.

It was on a Wednesday evening that the matter at last came up, but it was not in the manner Marty had visualized. He and Joe were trudging quietly about the park. A heavy fog had drifted in from the lake that morning and had swathed the world in its mysteriousness all day. It clung to the trees and bushes, its intangible grayness very cool and ghostly.

"What time should we start tomorrow morning, Marty?"

Martin lifted his head. "I was figuring on going to the hospital tomorrow, Joe."

"Oh." The single syllable held disappointment.

"I put my name down for it, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course; but I thought I'd better take a hike instead. We could do a little reviewing for that metaphysics quiz that comes up Friday."

Martin thrust his hands into the pockets of his topcoat. "We oughtn't to back out if we've signed up for it."

"I know, Marty, but it's beginning to look like a waste of time to me."

A surprised look came into Martin's eyes. The second-year



Philosophers had a group called the "St. Camillus Club," the principal work of which was to visit the inmates of the city jails and hospitals on their free days. Joe had joined the club with prompt enthusiasm and this sudden indifference was hard for Martin to understand.

"I thought you were keen on that work, Joe."

"Of course I am," protested Joe, "but there isn't much good I can do traipsing around these hospitals. The doctors and nurses are the ones that really help, and I feel silly sitting down alongside one of the patients and trying to make conversation." He looked up and caught the queer expression on Martin's face. "What's the matter, Marty? Did I say something I shouldn't have?"

"You kind of surprised me," he admitted. "Last year you talked all the time about the work that needed doing, caring for the sick, orphanages and that sort of thing. It sounded pretty good to me. I don't like to see you going cold on the idea."

"Oh, I'm not going cold on the idea, Marty," insisted Joe. "Don't get me wrong." The white silken muffler about his neck had worked a trifle out of place and he fussily adjusted it. "It's just that I'm seeing things in a better perspective. The organization, the gathering of funds for institutions of that sort is the priest's main concern; the detail work, the administration will have to be handled by others."

It was said with an airy assurance, but it did not deceive Martin. He had learned that if a fellow talked straight out it was easy to find what to answer him, but if a subtle pride kept him from facing facts it was like walking in this fog that pressed so thickly about them. One had to feel one's way. "Two weeks ago, Joe, I visited the City Hospital. There was a woman there who had tried to take her life. They kept a guard on her, day and night. She had had one child, a boy. He was killed in an accident. She couldn't have any more

children, and with her boy gone there was nothing left for her to live for. It took her two hours to tell it to me."

"What did you say to her?"

Martin was abruptly silent. He thrust his hand embarrassedly through his hair. "Man alive, my hair's all wet with this fog."

"Well, why in heaven's name don't you wear your biretta or a hat when you go outside?" demanded Joe. "You'll be getting pneumonia or something."

"It's not cold," came Martin's meek response, "besides I didn't think it would be this damp."

"Quit stalling around," ordered Joe, "and tell me what you said to that woman."

Martin hesitated. "Not much," he finally said, "but I saw her last Thursday and they had taken the guard away. She said she was going to adopt a child. It did her a lot of good, she said, just to have been able to talk to someone."

Joe shrugged the shoulders of his comfortable coat irritably about his shoulders. "I'd have been bored stiff, Marty. I know I shouldn't be that way, but I can't help it. They've only got one subject to talk about—themselves. I listened to a few of them and it was the same routine; all the gruesome details of their sickness and symptoms, the whole mess of clinical details about their operations and pains. It filled me up so that I couldn't breathe. Some fellows can sit through that kind of stuff and not be affected by it. I can't."

He pattered along beside Martin, his neatly shod feet making compact little sounds on the walk. Martin's silence seemed to him a condemnation of his attitude and after a while he spoke out in his own defense. "I don't see that it makes much difference, Marty. There are all types of work for the priest to do, and there will be needed all types of men to handle it. We will need executives and social service workers, professors and pastors. Some have to be in there doing the contact work, others have to be directing and planning. Besides, this hospital

work is only a sideline right now. The studies are the important thing, and I need a full free day in the open air every week or my studies are not up to their usual standard."

Martin made no reply, for he felt the truth of what Joe had said, even while he realized that he had been subtly relegated to the class of the humble spade workers, and Joe elevated to an executive position. But Joe was above him in mental attainments. He knew that.

Joe's walk slowed down to a more contented pace. He read Martin's silence as an assent to the correctness of the explanation he had given. They were passing through a fir-lined stretch of the garden and the fog shrouded the trees so thickly that the path was shadowed. Its dank, drear length called up memories of a cell block, memories that Joe had been vainly struggling against for weeks. His first visit to the city jail had brought him into an atmosphere as cheerless and colorless as this choking greyness that enveloped him. It was in Death Row that he had for the first time faced life's stark reality, the living who were about to die. Pale faces, unshaven faces, and in their eyes there was gathered up, as in two limpid drops of water, the whole ocean of humanity's bitterness and evil and futility and fear.

He had essayed to speak to one of the condemned men and had had a brutal curse for his pains. It had sickened him, and shaken his faith. What, after all, did he have to offer? Words, only words. God, love, hope—what could they mean to this man? He was without hope; he must die. Forgiveness? There was no forgiveness; not from men; they had decreed his death. And that was all that concerned him. The forgiveness of God had no significance in the face of man's implacable exaction of justice.

Back at the seminary the face of the man had haunted him, and even more had the futility of his own efforts obsessed him. In doubt and distress his mind blundered blindly about until in desperation he had recourse to Father White. The Prefect

had spoken very kindly, and yet his words had hurt. "There is a world of distance," he declared, "between one's ideals and reality, Mr. McBride. You must not become self-centered by the profundity of your studies. The priest's preparation is to find the truth, and to acquire the strength to impart it to others. You don't do good to others without paying a price. Insults, boredom, ingratitude are a cheap price for a soul. This work is a foretaste of what your future work will expose you to. 'Love casteth out fear.' Patience will open locked doors, and prayer will give you a strength you never dreamed of."

He was telling him that he had been cowardly, fearful. Well, who wouldn't be? The other fellows were made differently. They could meet that sort of experience and not be disturbed. He was not made that way. Moreover, the entire work was not essential. It was not prescribed; it was an optional thing entirely.

"Look, Joe," Martin's voice broke in quietly, "you've only tried the jail and the hospital. There are still the home for crippled children and that school for the mutes. You might find that class of people easier for you to work with."

So he had not deceived Martin either with his talk about the executive type. Marty knew that he was shirking the discomfort and the dirt and the fear which the work entailed.

"Yes, and there's the asylum for the insane, too," he replied bitterly.

"I'm sorry, Joe. I was just trying to be helpful."

"I know, Marty. I shouldn't have said that." With lowered head, he made his confession of weakness. "I've had so much sickness myself, Marty, that the mere sight of it does something to me. That may be the whole trouble, Marty."

Martin said nothing for a while. "I'll go with you on that hike tomorrow, Joe," he finally announced.

Joe's face brightened up, for he knew that Marty saw things his way at last. "Thanks, Marty. Let's get an early start so we can make a day of it."

"Right."

"I hope this fog clears up before then."

"So do I."

The air had grown chill and raw and Martin tucked in his chin and pulled the lapels of his coat about him. They walked towards the house, Joe's trim polished oxfords very firm in their pace now. The laces were neatly tucked inside the shoe tops. Joe was like that. Things had to be neat, and life a precisely wrapped package with no trailing strings or bothersome bulges. But life was not that way; it was awkward, irritating, unpredictable, a clumsy burden that one had to learn to carry as best one could, and as helpfully as one could for the others, who, too, were burdened with the same unwieldy weight of living.

## Chapter 14

THE afternoon recreation was almost over and Rube, perspiring and dustied from play, felt the need of a bath. He hurried up the steps to the tower to get a towel, but as he burst into the dormitory he saw Joe at the far end of the aisle, standing hunched over the radiator. He went up to him. "What's the matter, Joe? Are you cold?" he asked.

Joe turned a yellowed, contorted face towards him. "I'm sick, Rube. Gee, am I sick."

"Did you eat something?"

"No—gee, I'm sick." His forehead was shinily moist and tiny beads of perspiration clung to his upper lip.

"Get in bed. Come on. I'll get the Brother."

The Brother Infirmarian quickly arrived, and, after examining Joe, summoned Father White. A short while later Joe was on his way to the hospital. Rube and Father White went with him.

The next day Rube returned to the seminary. At great length he told Martin and Steve about the emergency operation, omitting none of the harrowing details. Steve gulped noisily. "Ye gods," he protested, "you ought to have been a butcher, Rube."

"I'm just telling you what I saw."

"How is he doing now?" asked Martin.

Rube grinned. "The operation was a success. Period. He'll have to stay in the hospital a couple of weeks though."

"That's going to be very hard on Joe," said Martin thoughtfully.

"Why?" asked Rube. "He's got a private room and the Brothers will wait on him hand and foot."

"Well, you know how Joe is."

Steve looked at Martin. "Yes," he said, "we know how Joe is."

"He's been sick a lot, Steve," replied Martin defensively, "and he's used to having his mother and Alice take care of him. He hates hospitals."

The others thought that over a moment. Finally Steve spoke. "I'll see Father White for permission to visit him Thursday."

"That's a good idea," approved Martin.

"We'll have to bring him something, oranges and stuff." He took out a bill and laid it on the palm of his hand, then held it towards them. "Come on, shell out." Reluctantly Rube placed a half dollar on top of it. "Cheap skate." Rube flushed and put another half dollar on his palm. Martin cleaned out his pockets and finally scraped up the required dollar.

On Wednesday evening Steve went direct from Father White's office to the park where Rube and Martin were awaiting him. "Well, what's the good word, Steve? Did he give us permission?"

"No," came Steve's blunt answer. "Joe's gone home."

"Gone home?" chorused Martin and Rube.

"His father came and flew him back to New York. He figured that Joe could pick up better with home care."

"How long will he stay?" asked Rube.

"Till after Christmas, I guess," replied Steve.

"He's going to have a tough time catching up with his class work if he stays away that long," observed Martin thoughtfully.

"I told Father White that I'd send him a copy of my lecture notes. He said that was all right, but he didn't seem very enthusiastic about it. He went in to visit Joe before he left. Joe sends us his best."

They stood about in glum silence for a while. Steve dug down into his pocket. "Here's your money back," he said, and thrust it towards them. Rube looked at the two half dollars reposing in his palm with a strange lack of interest. Money had no significance for him just then. He slid the coins into his pocket.

It was several days before Christmas that the parcel for Martin arrived. The return address was Joe's, so Martin called Rube and Steve and they hastened to the tower. With eager hands they tore open the wrappings. There were three gaily colored, woolen hockey caps with the names of each of them attached.

Rube pulled out his cap. "Boy, it's loaded!" Inside the cap were bars of chocolate and packages of gum and cigarettes.

"Well, who'd have thunk it!" exclaimed Steve unloading the contents of his cap.

"He's got a letter in mine." announced Martin.

"The dope! He's not supposed to do that. It's against postal regulations," said Steve.

"You'd kick at your own wedding," put in Rube. "What are you going to do now, report him to Washington?—What's the matter, Marty?"

"He's quit, he's not coming back."

"Joe? Quit? Go on, you're wacky," protested Rube.

"What does he want to quit for?" asked Steve blankly.

"It says so here," came Martin's amazed reply.

"Let's see." Steve took the paper and Rube crowded his face over his shoulder.



Dear Marty—

This is hard to write but I've got to tell you and the gang first before I notify Father White. I'm not coming back. I've been picking up strength but I'm still kind of weak and my dad will not hear of me doing any studying for some time. My mother and Alice have been waiting on me hand and foot or I wouldn't have made the progress I have. My dad says as soon as I go back into that lock-step regime I would break down again. I have thought it over a lot, and I guess he's right.

I remember how miserable we all felt when Dick quit and I guess you are going to feel the same about me—

"Here, snoop, read it." Steve thrust the letter angrily at Rube.

There was silence for a while and then Martin burst out. "His father's talked him into it."

"That doesn't make any difference," came Steve's sour reply. "He let himself be talked into it, didn't he?"

"But he wrote us first," urged Martin. "Father White doesn't know about this. Let's write him an air mail, special delivery, and straighten him out. There's time yet."

"What good is that going to do? He's made up his mind," maintained Steve.

"It's not what he wants," persisted Martin. "He was talked into it."

"I'm not writing to him," came Steve's flat assertion.

"Then I will."

"You think you can talk him out of it?"

"Sure. Joe will listen to us. I'll put it to him strong."

"You're just sticking out your neck, Marty," replied Steve. "Joe's a weak sister." He gestured contemptuously. "Writing a letter!"

"What's wrong with that?" demanded Rube. "Did you expect him to make a special trip out here to tell us his decision? A little bit of that charity which we are supposed to practice would—"

"O.K., O.K.," acknowledged Steve. "I was out of line. I'm sorry."

"Joe's been sick," continued Rube; "keep that fact in front of you when you're talking about him."

"Health doesn't make much difference," Steve retorted tossing his cap on the bed. "It's the spirit in a man that counts. The way I see it, Joe doesn't want to be a priest badly enough to put up with all the sacrifices that go with it."

"It's harder for him because he's sick," excused Rube.

"Of course it is, as far as health goes," came Steve's quick reply. "It's harder for me, as far as studies go."

"I don't care," announced Martin. "I'm going to write him anyhow."

"Go ahead, run your dome against a stone wall," said Steve. "I tell you he's made his decision. Even if his dad did talk him into it, I'll bet you he didn't have to talk too hard."

"But good grief," protested Martin vehemently, "we can't just sit here and let him walk out on us. With Dick we couldn't do anything. This is different. We've got a chance." He thrust out his hands appealingly to Steve. "You and I would do something if Rube was going to pull out—wouldn't we?"

"Sure if it would do any good," came Steve's reluctant assent.

"Well, then, come on. I'll write the letter. You and Rube sign along with me."

"O.K., Marty. But it won't do any good. I'm willing to bet."

Rube gave him a disapproving glance. "Crape hanger!"

The letter was written and swiftly dispatched. But two days later, before their reply arrived, Father White met them on the campus, and casually informed them that Joe had notified the Rector of his withdrawal from the seminary. Later they had a long letter from Joe which merely confirmed that mournful fact.

## Chapter 15

THE second year of philosophy was coming to its close. During the last few weeks the final examinations, embracing the entire material treated in the past two years, absorbed them with exhausting, relentless demands. But at long last they, too, were successfully over and done with.

And then came the day when they took final leave of their aerie in the tower. They went from it with hurried gladness, the pull of home joys strong within them. For two years that bleak tower had been their dwelling, a place of silence and aloneness and separation. They went from it with gladness, and yet, in the years to come, the thought of it would be irretrievably bound up with the deathless memories of youth, its eagerness, its wide outlook, its sharp sorrows and swift disillusionments.

On the train there was restraint between them, for this was separation again, and they felt the need of some pledge, some assurance from each other; and yet no one could find the words that needed to be said. Eventually, Martin fumbled out into speech. "Do you remember that time Father White gave us a talk on particular friendships?"

"Particular friendships?" said Steve in a wondering voice.

"He gave us so many talks," complained Rube, "how do you expect us to remember?"

"You remember," persisted Martin. "It was about some fellows forming cliques and crowding out every one else."

"Oh that! Yes, I remember it now." Steve's gaze was puzzled.

"Remember the Latin line he used? *Nunquam unus, raro duo, semper tres*. Never one, rarely two, always three."

"So what?" asked Rube.

"Yes; what's the connection, Marty?" inquired Steve.

"That last part—always three—I—I kind of thought it would be a good ticket for us. *Always Three*."

They thought it over a moment. "It's a good idea," agreed Rube.

Steve nodded assent. "We've not done so well, fellows," he announced, "in fact, we've kind of come apart at the seams. I think it's because of two reasons. First, we haven't been frank enough with each other."

"I've always spoken my piece when I had anything to say," protested Rube.

"Maybe you have, Rube, but maybe Marty and I haven't. If we had talked straight from the shoulder to Dick and Joe when they started to go off the rails all of us might still be here. So let's agree—no holding back." They nodded agreement. "And then the second thing. Marty's hit the nail on the head there. *Always Three*. We'll keep in touch with each other this vacation. I'll bet Dick would never have quit if we had been around him more last vacation."

There was immediate agreement on the part of Martin and Rube, and all three of them made careful and detailed plans for the vacation months that lay before them.

There was a shining newness about their return to the seminary after this vacation. They were first-year Theologians now, and as they gazed at the lowly recruits for Philosophy they could think back to their own awkward entrance here two years ago, and of all the labor and learning and loss that

those years had meant. They could not entirely suppress a faint feeling of superiority.

To each of them was assigned a small room on the fourth floor. The arrangements of the room were monastic in their simplicity: a bed, a table, a bookshelf, a clothespress and, on the wall, a crucifix. There was a small radiator, and a window. The name of the occupant was displayed on a card affixed to the door.

"I'm going to like this," confided Rube to Martin.

"It's the same as mine," said Martin with shining eyes. "Small and snug. It's—it's like home."

"I'll soon have things rigged shipshape. See this?" Rube displayed a mechanical device the main items of which were an alarm clock and a small electric heater. "I set this gadget for fifteen minutes before rising time. Automatically, the heater goes on, and I have hot water to shave with when I get up."

"An automatic hair straightener would be more in your line, Rube," replied Martin, tousling Rube's disorderly black mop of hair with a friendly hand.

"The Wild Man from Borneo," commented Steve. "He'll never learn to use a comb."

"What's the difference?" grinned Rube. "Creepy won't be hounding me any more."

"No; but the new prefect, Father Stoner, will. And he might be tougher," warned Steve.

"Prefects!" Rube dismissed them with a disparaging wave of his hand. "I'll see that he doesn't find any of this stuff."

Steve gave Rube an irritated look and then flung a contemptuous gesture at the mechanical water heater. "Look, Rube, just when are you going to grow up?"

Rube stared at him a moment, then gave a short laugh. "What's eating you?"

"All those stupid gadgets. Why don't you settle down and get serious?"

"You never complained up in the tower last year," retorted Rube, "when those stupid gadgets turned out hot chocolate for you."

"That's beside the point," replied Steve with imperious unconcern. "You used to be ranting all the time about living poorly, giving an example to the world of how simplicity does it, and yet you keep loading up with new gadgets; and during vacation you were strutting around with the flashiest clothes."

"What's wrong with that? I'm not taking a vow of poverty."

"Who said you were?"

"You did."

"I was talking about the *spirit* of poverty. We're Theologians now. This is the last step. We ought to put our backs into the job."

"Oh, go soak your head in a barrel of vinegar," retorted Rube indignantly. "I don't have to put on an act just because I'm a Theologian. Besides, this is my room and I'll do what I want in it."

"O.K., Junior." Steve stalked away.

"Junior!" echoed Rube bitterly. He turned to Martin. "Just because he's got his room fixed up like a general's headquarters is no reason I should do the same, is it?"

"It's your room, Rube," conceded Martin, "but some of the things he said made sense."

Rube turned away and picked up a book. "I know," he admitted in a shamefaced sort of voice, "but it was the way he told me about it that got my back up. If he's going to be like that when he's a priest I sure pity the people in his parish."

## Chapter 16

A LIFE-SIZE painting hung at the rear of the lecture hall. It portrayed a fleshy-faced man in the flowing white habit of the Dominican Order, and some lettering proclaimed his title: *Doctor Angelicus*, the Angelic Doctor. The eyes corroborated the title. With the open yet penetrating passionlessness of angelic wisdom they gazed down upon the ranks of Theologians seated in silent attentiveness before their solemn-visaged Prefect.

"There is more latitude allowed you as Theologians," announced Father Stoner's husky voice, "than you enjoyed as Philosophers. You are presumed to have reached that stage in your training where you possess the intelligence and the character to understand how to employ the liberties allowed you." The thin line of the lower lip pressed hard against the upper one as though he had forced himself to swallow a bitter-tasting potion. "You have individual rooms. Smoking, as you know, is forbidden at all times in the rooms. There should be a greater effort on the part of all of you to approximate that degree of clerical decorum which is so needful if you are to be priests of God and leaders of His people. I particularly wish you to pay close attention to your language. The use of slang and of nicknames should be strongly discouraged..."

He enumerated sundry other regulations. At the conclusion

he stood up and walked from the room, a tall man with a singularly stately walk, unhurried, inevitable.

Puff Peters looked at Martin. "Different from Father White, eh?"

"You can say that again."

"I'm not exactly looking forward to attending his lectures on canon law," announced Puff.

"Canon law," echoed Rube. "That branch was made to order for him. Did he lay down enough regulations for you, Steve?"

"Is that wit or humor?" came Steve's sharp reply.

Rube grinned good-humoredly. "If you'd just made believe you were swallowing something sour when you said that you'd have been a facsimile of Father Stoner."

Steve turned away irritably. "You'd better watch your step, Rube. He's not like Father White."

"I think Steve likes him," said Rube to the others.

The pattern of their philosophy days was repeated, but now their knowledge of philosophy was taken for granted and used as a scaffolding within which the edifice of theological learning was to be erected. Each day, the first lecture was on moral theology and the second lecture on dogmatic theology. These were the two main subjects and all the rest, canon law and exegesis, liturgy and homilectics, were subsidiary to them.

Martin manifested an immediate interest in moral theology. It treated about the things he wanted to know, and in the person of his professor, Father McClellan, he found added inspiration for its study.

The curious mixture of softness and strength in the man intrigued him. Standing in prayer before the class, the tall, slightly stooped figure always gave Martin an impression of profound, unassuming simplicity; and then, the prayers said, and the lecture under way, a bright, keen, sure personality emerged. With scientific exactness he probed into the study



of human conduct and its struggle to obtain its supernatural, final end under the direction of reason and faith. He led them surely, confidently into the most speculative aspects of a question, but he was not a cloud-wrapped idealist. What Martin especially relished were the sudden, unexpected, personal applications he would derive from the study of the abstrusest problem. He was not a mere theorist; he felt and lived the things he taught.

Attentively, Martin listened to the lectures and read all the reference books in the library. At every opportunity he manifested his interest by propounding objections and involved questions. On occasion Father McClellan's broad scholastic brow wrinkled and his eyes showed a faint worriment. The significance of that fact escaped Martin.

To him Father McClellan was a fount of wisdom. He knew of the degrees that the professor held from American and European universities. He had heard of the industry that had brought him to the heights of learning, and it was said that since his seminary career Father McClellan had never spent more than one hour each day for recreation. But what the priest had done was less important than what he was. For Martin, the intellectual sureness and the quiet spirituality of the man created an atmosphere of reality, of enviable dignity. He would be like him.

Rube and Steve's appreciation of their professor was more reserved, and their efforts in moral theology did not wander so far afield. They industriously took notes during the lectures and memorized them conscientiously for the weekly quiz period. When the first ratings were listed, it came as a blow to Martin to discover that their marks excelled his. He raised his voice in protest.

"It's the same old story," said Rube. "You're not giving him what he wants. You're reading every author on the subject and you don't get Noldin down pat enough."

"I want to learn the thing inside and out," protested Martin.

"You're learning all right," grinned Rube, "but it's not the kind of learning that will get you better marks."

"Who cares about marks?" said Martin, reversing his field.

"You do," grinned Rube provocatively. "Shucks, Marty, you always want to be the shining light, way out in front, don't you?"

"You're off your base," muttered Martin shamefacedly.

"That's O.K. with me if you want it that way," replied Rube with a generous gesture. "Play it your own way, but why do you always have to play it the screwiest way possible?"

"Slang," chided Steve.

"Oh, yes, slang," said Rube, his brow wrinkling ill-humoredly. "We're Theologians now."

"Rube's right, Marty," judged Steve with unruffled calm. "Quit making a research out of every tract."

Martin remained stubbornly silent. He had galaxies of notebooks sparkling with the brilliants of thought garnered from his wide and insistent reading. To him this represented knowledge. It made him different from the other self-satisfied plodders, it put him above them, and made of him a lone seeker after the truth. The idea of relinquishing this was distinctly repugnant.

One day, during a lecture, a decision of the Council of Trent was cited, and Martin reached over for Rube's new *Enchiridion*, a collection of all the church decrees. It was a new edition bound in red cloth. Martin found the decree, and had begun to read it, when he noticed the oppressiveness of the silence about him. The flow of Father McClellan's eloquent Latin had suddenly ceased. Martin lifted his head. Father McClellan's indignant eyes were directed at him. "In Moral lectures there is no place for novels. It is a disgrace for a Theologian to be seen with one in this hall." He paused. The faces of the assembled Theologians looked up at him, dumb-foundedly aware that someone was out of line and totally

ignorant of who the culprit was. His next words answered their unvoiced questioning. "I refer to Mr. Manning."

Martin's face crimsoned, his hands clutched the book, and he surged to his feet. A hand as heavy as a ton of pig iron clamped on his arm and held him fast to his chair. "Sit still, you horse's neck," whispered Steve. "Sit still."

Martin's whole body was trembling with shame and indignation.

The voice of Father McClellan was speaking again, in Latin, smooth-flowing, well-rounded, Ciceronian periods. Martin closed his notebook. A bitterness, such as he had never dreamed of, rose up within him. He was white with anger and cold with a sense of betrayal.

The prayers after class were said, and Father McClellan went from the hall. At once Martin's hand closed on the red-bound *Enchiridion*, but Steve laid hold of him. "Wait, Marty, wait."

"Get your hand off me," grated Martin. "Get it off, I said."

Steve's hand dropped away. This was a new Martin to him, a burning-eyed yet ragingly calm person.

Martin strode swiftly down to Father McClellan's room and knocked at the door. It opened at once. Father McClellan stared at him. "Yes?"

"This is the novel I was reading in your lecture, Father." He thrust the *Enchiridion* at him.

Father McClellan took it and his eyes widened in surprise as he read the title. He looked up at Martin and his lips opened to say something, but Martin's outraged stare seemed to shock him back into silence. Slowly his lips came together and his gaze went back to the book. For some time he seemed to be absorbed in a study of the book's cover. Finally, he spoke and his tone was very casual. "This is the new edition," he observed. "I did not know it had appeared on the market as yet." He paged through it a bit. "The paper is good but the binding is cheap." He closed the book.

"You cited a decree. I was looking it up. That's what you instructed us to do."

"I have my order in for a copy of this new edition but it hasn't arrived as yet." He handed it back to him.

"This belongs to Mr. Ward. I leaned over to borrow it from him."

"You should have your own copy. They are not expensive."

Martin's eyes, still hot with anger, were fastened on the face of his professor, but no further word was forthcoming. Father McClellan gave him an enigmatic glance, stepped back, and closed the door.

There was a class in progress, but Martin did not attend it. Deliberately he went to his room, tossed the *Enchiridion* on the bed and sat down at his desk. After a while he stood up and went to the window and gazed out moodily over the red-tiled roof of the church to where the distant woodlands made a dark, hazy scarf about the throat of the horizon. He had been living in a dream world and it had crumbled about him. If there were no understanding, generosity and justice here in these halls, whose existence was due to those ideals, whose purpose was dedicated to the reviving of them and the teaching of them—where would he find them?

How long he stood there, his mind a turmoil of bitterness, he did not know; but it must have been for the better part of an hour, for when he awoke to reality Rube's hand was tugging at his arm. "Come on, Marty, come on."

He followed Rube dully out-of-doors. It was recreation period and Steve was waiting for them. "How long did you talk with Father McClellan?" asked Steve.

"Only a minute."

Rube turned on him. "Holy hat! Where were you all the rest of the time?"

"In my room."

"You cut class?"

"Dry up, Rube," ordered Steve. "What did Father McClellan say, Marty?"

"His copy of the *Enchiridion* has not arrived."

"Was that all?" said Rube.

"That's all."

"Didn't you tell him?"

"Sure."

"Didn't he excuse himself or apologize or something?"

"No. He just said I should get my own copy of the *Enchiridion*."

"Holy mackerel!" ejaculated Rube indignantly.

"He can't be that small—he can't," protested Steve in vehement disbelief. "He's a real scholar, a gentleman."

"I don't get it; I don't get it," worried Rube, wagging his head from side to side.

In dazed and gloomy incredulity they paced along until the bell rang, summoning them to class.

After supper Rube met Steve outside the gymnasium. "I couldn't find Marty any place," he complained. "I looked all over."

"He's probably in church trying to figure out what to do," replied Steve.

They stood in silence, unmindful of the faint sounds of play that filtered out to them from the gymnasium's open portals.

Rube spoke: "If he quits, we go too, don't we, Steve?"

After a long pause Steve replied. "Yes, we quit, too. This is different from Dick and Joe. Marty's got a dirty deal and we have to stick by him."

Rube pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one. "You think Marty will quit?"

Steve nodded assent. "As soon as he gets around to it." He turned to Rube. "But don't you say anything to him about what we've decided. He's got to make his own decision. Once he's made it, we'll back him up."

"Afraid he might hang on if he knows we'll quit because of him?" asked Rube shrewdly.

"Yes."

"O.K. Mum's the word."

Rube dropped his cigarette, ground it under his heel, and they entered the gymnasium.

A quiz period in moral theology was scheduled for the next morning. Totally unprepared for it, Martin entered the lecture hall. Through the confusion of his thoughts there still struggled a faint hope that Father McClellan might repair his mistake of the previous day by a public explanation to the class. He fixed his eyes on his desk, waiting for Father McClellan's opening words.

"Mr. Manning."

Martin's head snapped up. "Yes, Father."

"Explain the system called 'probabilism.'"

The light of expectancy went out of Martin's face. He looked down at his desk, fumbled a few halting words, and stopped. With kindly consideration, Father McClellan prompted him. Martin refused the prompting and remained silent. The Professor tried again. Martin's face was a perfect blank, and Father McClellan quietly turned from him and called on Rube.

Rube was fully prepared for the quiz. Distinctly and carefully he proceeded to propound a completely unheard-of system which was so extreme in its contradictions that it caused Father McClellan to throw up his hands. "That is a *mixtum compositum* of everything wrong. Hasn't anyone a clear view of the matter?"

Steve's hand shot aloft and he was signaled to proceed. He did. In a masterly way he finished the work of confusion which Rube had inaugurated. "Probabilism," he loudly proclaimed, "is the system which permits one to follow the opinion that favors liberty, even though the opinion is merely

slightly probable, or even if the opinion is doubtfully probable."

"Mr. Kolesar! That is Laxism—a system that has been condemned!" Father McClellan stared perplexedly at the class. "How you could have so misunderstood my lectures is beyond me. Open your books. I shall review the matter for you. Please pay attention."

That evening, Martin called on Father White. The kindly blue eyes looked up from the array of open books on his desk, and showed surprise. "A Theologian visiting the philosophy department," said Father White. "This is an unexpected privilege—and a pleasure. Sit down, Mr. Manning."

Martin took the chair. "Father, I'm in trouble and—and I'd like to—well, I want to quit."

Father White pushed away the books. "Been cutting corners?"

"No, Father."

"Studies?"

"Not exactly, but it happened in class." Martin told him the whole story.

When he had finished Father White sat staring for a long time at the place he had cleared on his desk. Abruptly, he took off his glasses and polished them. His face looked strangely child-like without those thick-lensed spectacles. Carefully, he replaced them. "Well, my boy, I would say you have experienced a humiliation. You have something to be happy about."

"Happy?" echoed Martin indignantly.

"You know what you came here for, don't you?"

"Of course, to become a priest."

"And a priest is another Christ." He waited a moment, as though expecting that word to call up the memory of the gentle lowliness after which he was striving. "How do you think you become humble? By being humiliated. Just as you become patient by suffering irritating things."

"I know that, Father. But how can a priest be so unfair? He's my teacher, isn't he? Is he just going to teach me morals? I can get that out of a book. I want him to show me how to live it."

Father White looked at him long and searchingly. "Perhaps that is just what he was trying to do. I would not judge him so quickly." Martin stared at him in blank incomprehension. Father White looked down at his desk again. "But, disregarding that possibility for the present, I believe I've told you before that there's quite a disparity between one's ideals and the putting of them into practice."

"You did, Father; but what's the use of becoming a priest when the disparity is so great between what you are supposed to be and what you really are? I can be that good outside as a layman."

"Did you ever meet a man who was so filled with the importance of his ideals that he did not care what others said or did or thought?"

Martin blinked at the abruptness of the transition. "No, I don't believe so, Father," he replied slowly. "A fellow needs others to think the same way he does. A leader has to have followers."

"You're wrong. A man with ideals *will* have followers. He doesn't need them. His ideals are all he needs."

"But when the one who is supposed to teach you those ideals, the one who is supposed to be the example for you—"

"You've only got one Model. Following Him you will never go wrong. He will never let you down." The priest's utter conviction held Martin silent. He did not for a moment doubt the truth of what Father White had said, but it was not touching the problem that turmoiled within him.

"It's the untruth in it all, Father, that got me. Don't you see? How can the system be right when it produces such smallness and pride in the individual?"

"That is *in spite* of the system and the ideal, not *because of*



it. You're going to meet pettiness and unworthiness all your life through, son, and it will be in places that you least expect it. It's going to cast you down, grieve you, but what has that to do with you—the real you? Should it not be just so much more an incentive for you to realize in your own life the ideals which others are only half-heartedly carrying out?"

"You mean I should get a lift for greater effort from running into something like this?"

"Life isn't a satisfaction. It's a purification," replied Father White.

Martin fidgeted rebelliously with his cincture. "But from a priest, a priest," he kept muttering.

"There are good priests and indifferent ones," came the steady reply. "What has that got to do with you? You want to be a good priest?"

"Yes."

"Then go ahead and work at it. Everything will help you to it—even this which has happened. It will show you, at the very least, what not to do." Martin stood up. "Feel better? Is it cleared up?"

"I don't know. I tried to forget all about it. I read a novel. I talked with Rube and Steve, but I still feel like I'm going down an express elevator."

"There's only one place to go when you are in trouble. You know that, I presume."

Martin looked at him. "I forgot." At the door he turned. "Thanks, Father."

He made his way to the chapel and for a long time he stayed in the enshrouding emptiness, thinking, trying to pray, but no light came to his darkness and no answer to his need.

For days and weeks he went through the physical actions of his daily duties, but somehow everything had become pointless. Solicitously, Steve and Rube hovered about him, awaiting his decision, but he had nothing to say to them. He grew extremely silent during the hours of recreation, and at lectures

there was no longer his usual flow of questions and objections.

Christmas came, and the Theologians were allowed to go home for the holidays. Martin, however, stayed at the seminary. He told Rube and Steve that he could not afford the trip home. At once Rube offered to loan him the needed money, but Martin refused. "I don't know when I'll be able to pay it back, Rube."

"Who cares? Your credit is good."

"Go on, take it," urged Steve. "After what's happened you need a break."

Martin was silent. "I can't, fellows. If I went home now I'd not come back—and I haven't made up my mind yet."

They crowded up close to him then. "Whatever you say, Marty. Take your time."

"We feel like you do about this," said Steve. "It was a rotten deal."

Something of their purpose shone through their loyal response, and it made Martin all the more chary of a hasty decision.

## *Chapter 17*

IN the very heart of the woodland, bordering the seminary grounds, there was a replica of the grotto of Lourdes. Stately elms and twisted towering oaks walled it in with their solemn stillness. Here it was, early in the days of seminary life, that Martin had first felt the touch of a great calm, the calm that lay at the depth of the seminary's being. He knew it now, after these years in its comforting presence, for what it was—the quiet that comes from an ordered existence, the great contentment of hourly achievement casting out the hungers of greed and the confusion of self-seeking. It was the soul-satisfying calm that comes from purposefulness. Each day one advanced upward by small stages of prayer and study, as if on a narrow climbing road towards the gate of decision, a narrow gate that opened on to wide lands.

In his trouble, Martin came here frequently. Kneeling in prayer at the shrine, he struggled for a decision; trudging moodily in the solitude of the forest he savored the soothing stillness and fought the fear of losing it. He had cut himself away from the rest, he had submerged himself in work; but his hours of study had become periods of fret and strain, a great confusion of thoughts tumbling through his mind like the purposeless rushing of wheels, going and returning, ever coming and going, and leaving only emptiness in their wake.

The quiet that had once pervaded his work was gone, and in its place had come another spirit. And he knew it for what it was. He had experienced it before. It was the tortured spirit that pervaded the outside world's way of work. The world made of work a weapon for conquest, a weapon to wrest to oneself possessions, to batter one's way up over the crowd, a weapon to carve out power and make oneself master of other men's destinies. But work here in the seminary was imbued with a different spirit. It was a weapon, too, but a weapon of *self* conquest. All the results of one's labors were for others: the studies uncovering the truth for those who sought it; and the life of prayer making him the servant of the seekers after truth.

Why then did it no longer hold the peace and satisfaction for him that it once held? Had he lost the right purpose? Was he trying by work to wrest something for himself? His self scrutiny brought no answer, and he betook himself to prayer. Slowly, a sense of quiet began to return.

One day, kneeling before the shrine, the utter calm and absorption of his prayer was broken by the dry, crackling sound of a branch being trodden underfoot. He came to his feet, turning quickly as he did so. Rube was standing there, staring at him, his narrow forehead wrinkled with worry. "Are you in training for the Trappists, Marty?"

"I'm just trying to do a little thinking, Rube," came the embarrassed reply. "It's quiet out here."

Rube went slowly up to him. "Look, Marty, this ducking off by yourself is no good," he advised. "Snap out of it. I haven't seen you take part in any games for weeks."

"I don't know what it is, Rube," confessed Martin. "There's no interest for me in games any more. It—it all seems sort of useless."

"Useless, my foot!" exclaimed Rube. "You made a regular nuisance of yourself last year charging out of the dormitory

in the morning as soon as the gong went off and none of us could tone you down. 'A fellow's supposed to be prompt. It's the rule.' That's what you gave us all the time. 'It's the rule, it's the rule.' Well, recreation is a rule, too. Chew on that." Rube paused for breath, and Martin stared at him. He had never seen him in this role before. Rube's next sentence made everything clear. "You wouldn't be getting all those confounded headaches if you'd take some exercise, Marty."

"Don't worry about me, Rube," he said gratefully. "I'm all right. The doctor doesn't think that lack of exercise has anything to do with my trouble."

"Fat lot he knows," retorted Rube. "You're overworking this thinking business, Marty. Give it a rest, will you?"

"Very well, Rube. I'll give it a rest."

"And right now," persisted his friend. "Let's head for the handball courts."

"O.K.—doctor."

There was a faint smile about Martin's lips, and, at sight of it, Rube grinned and threw his arm over Martin's shoulders. "Sometimes I think you'll never grow up, Marty."

"Sometimes I wish I wouldn't."

They took the path that led towards the campus. After an interval of silence, Rube turned to his companion. "You know something, Marty?"

"What?"

"I don't like old Stonewall Jackson."

"Father Stoner? Why, what has he done to you?"

"Enough. Has he been around to see you?"

"No."

"Well, keep your room in order. He's making the rounds. He barged into my room during study period."

"What did he do?"

"Went right up to my washstand and pointed that big long finger of his at the hair oil and stuff on the shelf. 'What,' he says, 'is the purpose of all this trash?' He didn't wait for my

answer either. 'Bathe regularly and you will not need cologne. Get rid of this trash at once.'

"Some of the stuff was kind of loud," observed Martin.

"I wouldn't have had the stuff if you and Steve hadn't kept pestering me about my hair," defended Rube.

"That was the hair oil," said Martin mildly. "The other junk was your own responsibility."

"Oh, I don't care about that so much, but he found my gadget for heating water, and he took the whole blamed thing." Rube's face was mutinous at this infringement of his property rights. "I tried to argue with him. All he did was to give me the fisheye. I closed up mighty sudden." He walked along for a while in sullen silence, considering the magnitude of his grievances.

Martin studied him curiously for a while, opened his mouth to say something and then thought better of it. At last he ventured into speech. "What about your radio, Rube?"

Rube jerked around to face him. "What about it?" he demanded.

"Well," began Martin hesitantly, "the way things are going, I think it might be a good idea to—"

"I'm not getting rid of it," broke in Rube decisively.

"It will mean real trouble if he catches you with it."

"He won't."

It was very plain to Martin that, under the circumstances, any further advice, no matter how well-intentioned, would not be listened to. They had come to the handball courts and Martin turned to him. "Ready for some handball, Rube?"

"No," growled Rube, "not now."

"But I thought—"

"Skip it, Marty. I don't feel in the mood."

Rube's radio set was very ingeniously arranged inside of a suitcase. By day the suitcase reposed on top of his clothes

closet; by night it was placed on the floor beside his bed, and the pair of phones adjusted to Rube's ears.

A broadcast had been scheduled for release from Vatican City. It was the first occasion that the Supreme Pontiff was to go on the air and, since none of the local stations were carrying the broadcast, Father Hoffman, the science professor, had informed the faculty that they could hear the address on the receiving set in the science laboratory. This set had exceptional short-wave range, due, in part, to the large aerial mounted on the roof of the main building.

At 10:00 P.M. the assembled Fathers caught the announcer's voice. "This is Vatican City. It is my great—"

A horrible concatenation of squawks and whirrings interrupted the speaker.

Father Hoffman frantically manipulated the dials. After some time the disturbance was eliminated, and the voice of the Supreme Pontiff blossomed forth into the room, speaking with sonorous solemnity. At once, as if it had been lying in wait for the appearance of the foe, a rabid banshee jumped to its feet in the depths of the radio and shrilled the piercing protests of unorthodoxy. The Fathers muttered openly at the bedlam of sound stunning their eardrums, while Father Hoffman worried over the instrument panel. "It's not static," he explained. "I can't imagine where the disturbance is coming from."

Up in his darkened room Rube hung over the edge of his bed, his face an ecstasy of delight.

In disgust Father Hoffman finally turned off the set. "I'm sorry, Fathers, there must be someone else using our aerial." He looked pointedly at Father Stoner. "I shall check the matter tomorrow."

Father Stoner's lips folded in tightly as though he were forcing himself to swallow some unmanageable capsule. He stood up and left the room. Father Hoffman's open attempt

to explain away the inadequacy of his radio efforts by placing the blame on some seminarian was only to be ignored.

The following morning, in all lectures, Rube maintained an attitude of deep thought. With his head bowed in profound concentration upon his upended right fist—he slept.

It was one of those seemingly insignificant quirks of fate that brought his slumbers to an almost disastrous conclusion. During the class in canon law, Mr. Wurmser asked some pointless question and Father Stoner's barbed reply drew laughter from the assembled class. Father Stoner's slightly amused glance roved about the group of hilarious countenances, and the profoundly glum and unresponsive attitude of Rube rose up and struck him like a blow. He studied the phenomenon for a moment, and then called out sharply: "Mr. Ward."

Steve, following Father Stone's glance, had seen it center on Rube, and at once he edged his foot over and trod sharply on Rube's toe. With admirable presence of mind, Rube allowed his head to come up very slowly. "Yes, Father?"

"Are you thinking or sleeping?"

Rube managed a hazy smile. "Thinking, Father."

"About what?"

"About Canon Number 138. Clerics are expressly forbidden to take part in the chase. Would trapping animals fall under that heading?"

"A profound thought." Puff's hand had shot into the air. "Yes, Mr. Peters, what is your interest in the matter?"

Puff blushed and looked uneasily about him. "We discussed that canon the other day, Father, Mr. Ward and I. We thought . . . that is, trapping could bring in some funds for the Mission Club."

"Oh, I see. A clerical branch of the Hudson Bay Trading Company. Why do you imagine that trapping would not fall under the extent of this canon?"

Puff began to blunder out reasons, and, in the ensuing dis-



cussion, Rube was forgotten and his curious attitude dismissed.

So thought Rube, until he entered his room for study period and found Father Stoner standing at the open window, his head thrust forward, completely absorbed in a study of the lead-in from the aerial. Slowly, he drew in his head, turned, and looked about the room, his eyes finally coming to rest on the satchel above the clothes closet. Then only did he take cognizance of Rube. "Mr. Ward, I am faced with a train of physical facts so closely interwoven that they partake of the nature of cause and effect." He ticked off the items on his fingers. "A prolonged disturbance on the radio last night; the proximity of the aerial's lead-in to your window; your manifest repose in the arms of Morpheus this morning in class. Open up that satchel, please."

Rube hauled down the satchel and opened it. "It's a radio, Father."

"So I see, so I see. Bring the entire thing to my office."

Rube trudged after him and placed the satchel on the floor.

"You may have this ingenious article of contraband when you go home. That time may be quicker than you expect if any more of these escapades occur." He took out a black notebook from his desk and made a mark in it.

Rube went rebelliously from the room and sought out Steve. "He took my radio," he announced.

Steve gave him a disapproving stare. He had warned Rube bluntly enough on their very first day as Theologians about this craze for gadgets. His warning had been ignored. He saw no reason to sympathize with him now. "You will probably get clipped for this, Rube. The call for Orders is not too far off."

"You're a lot of help, you are," retorted Rube bitterly.

Steve studied the sullen countenance of his friend, at a loss to understand his unwarranted resentment. "Look, Rube," said Steve. "You did a lot of talking when you first came here about the simple life and how you were going to show the

world how to live it. They are giving you a chance to work at it, right here and now. So what are you getting blue in the face about?"

"I know, I know," admitted Rube dejectedly, "and that's what makes me want to kick myself. I kept telling myself to get rid of these fool things, but I—I just couldn't."

"Oh, don't be so—so adhesive, Rube."

"That's easier said than done."

Steve eyed him a moment. In his book, a fellow either wanted something or he did not want it; what he wanted he did, what he did not want he just did not do. He gave an impatient shrug. "Let's go up to the infirmary and see Marty," he suggested.

"Is he sick again?"

"Another one of those headaches. Father Stoner chased him up to the infirmary."

Martin was in a darkened room, lying on a bed, with a damp cloth covering his eyes. They greeted him. He did not take away the cloth, and when he spoke his voice was strangely flat and tired. "Hi, Steve. Rube with you?"

"Yes, I'm here," put in Rube. "How's your head?"

"Better. The Brother gave me some medicine. I'm kind of dopey."

Steve sat down on the foot of the bed. "What's causing all these darned headaches?" he asked.

"I don't know. Father Stoner was here and said I have to go to the city to see a doctor as soon as this headache clears up."

"What doctor are you going to see?"

"Some eye doctor, Steve. I can't see anything when these things come on."

"That's kind of bad, Marty," he sympathized. "I hope he fixes you up all right."

The Brother Infirmarian came in and herded them out of the room.

## *Chapter 18*

FATHER STONER gestured towards the chair. "Sit down, Mr. Manning. I want to talk to you about your health."

Gingerly, Martin sat down. "Yes, Father."

"There is no noticeable improvement, is there?"

"No, Father. I got the glasses and use them, but they don't seem to help. Doctor Berger prescribed a medicine, which I have been taking, but that hasn't helped either."

"The headaches still come?"

"Yes, Father."

"Strange, strange. You have been losing quite a few class periods."

"I've been able to make it up though, Father."

"Yes, yes, I know. But if this sort of thing is to be chronic it becomes a serious factor in considering your admission to Orders."

"I thought as long as I kept up with the classwork, even if I missed lectures, it would be all right."

"It would not be all right. You have to be able to stand up to the routine, attend all the exercises, spiritual and otherwise. If your health does not allow that, well—the priesthood makes just as exigent demands on you."

"I can go through the routine even when I've got a head-

ache, Father, only it's kind of useless. I can't see very well, and—"

"That is the point I am making. You may have the best of will, but this partial blindness— Suppose it comes upon you while you are on the altar or administering a sacrament?"

Martin did not say anything, but the same thought had been in his own mind.

"I see that the same fact has evidently impressed you, too."

"It has, Father. What do you want me to do?"

"This matter came up in the last faculty meeting." He stopped abruptly. What he left unsaid was ominous in its implications. It was a disagreeable way he had. "Father White proposed the name of a doctor in the city, and I want you to see him this Thursday. Here is his address."

"Thank you, Father." Martin took the card and left the office.

Steve and Rube were waiting for Martin on his return from the city.

"I just reported to Father Stoner," Martin announced. "It doesn't look too good." He gave a tired sigh. "That city always makes me feel like I have been crawling in a sewer."

"What did the doctor say?" asked Steve.

"He claims one of the vertebrae is knocked out of alignment—subluxated is the word he used. You ought to have seen Father Stoner repeat that word—subluxated." Martin imitated the throaty, sourish tone of the priest. "The doctor thinks he can fix me up. Father Stoner doesn't."

"What are you going to do?" asked Rube.

"I'll try anything now. Look at this. A new diet."

Steve studied the list. "Lettuce, carrots, apples. A lot of rabbit food."

"How are you going to live on that?" asked Rube.

"I don't know myself. I'll have to eat five times a day.

Father Stoner said that he would make the necessary arrangements. He's being pretty good about this."

"I didn't know he could be that considerate," said Rube in a curiously flat tone of voice.

Martin turned. "Are you being sarcastic, Rube?"

Surprise filled Rube's countenance. "No, I meant that. I'm not holding anything against him for what he did to me. I had it coming to me for that high-school stuff I pulled. He was doing what he's there to do." He gave Martin a direct look. "How about you—and Father McClellan?"

Martin's gaze fell away from his demanding stare. "I'm—I'm waiting," he finally said.

"We can see that," replied Rube irritably. "For what?"

Martin looked at him. "It's hard to tell you, Rube."

"The Holy Ghost isn't going to come down on you in fiery tongues," burst out his friend. "You've got to make up your own mind, Marty."

"I know, and that's what's so hard." He looked at them, his eyes suddenly desperate with confusion. "I don't know what I'll do if I quit, Rube. Somehow I feel it's the right thing and yet—"

"It sticks in your throat when you see how some of them don't live up to it," interposed Steve.

"No, Steve. It did at first, but I've gotten over that. There are halfhearted men in every job on God's earth, I guess. It's myself."

"You mean your health?"

"That doesn't bother me. I'll drag along somehow or other. It's—well, suppose I turn out to be a halfhearted sort of priest, a second-rater? That's worse than treachery, the way I see it."

Rube stared at him dumbfoundly.

Steve raised his right arm and let it drop to his side disgustedly. "You're letting your imagination run away with you. It's not your job to decide about that. The faculty will."

"They can't know. They just go on a lot of external things

—studies and obeying the rules and that sort of thing. A fellow has to decide for himself.”

“Let’s get back to the house,” said Rube. “It’s almost time.” He was completely disappointed with the trend of the conversation. Martin was never going to make up his mind with that kind of muddling around.

## *Chapter 19*

THE interurban train sped noisily through the night. Martin was seated at the side of Father Stoner, and one glance at the Prefect's forbidding profile was enough to fill him with grave misgivings about Rube's fate.

A group of Theologians had gone to the city to attend a recital by the Roman choir. After the performance, Father Stoner had instructed them to get a bite to eat, but that all must be at the interurban station for the 11:45 P.M. train. Rube and his companion were the only ones who had failed to appear, and the group had left without them. Martin wanted to offer possible excuses for Rube, but the storm signals in Father Stoner's face warned him that discretion, in this instance, would definitely be the better part of valor.

The silence drew out to an awkward length. They were not far from the seminary station when Father Stoner finally took notice of the wordless Martin at his side. "There was a faculty conference the other day, Mr. Manning."

"Yes, Father."

"You were the subject of some discussion."

"Yes, Father."

"It seems you have developed aspirations to become a member of the Biblical Commission." Martin's face reddened.

"Father Youngman reports you memorized the entire Gospel of St. John in Latin. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Father."

"Quite an achievement. It is not on a par with your showing in canon law or moral theology."

Martin looked uncomfortable. "I study them, too."

"It is not a question of that. Moral theology is of more importance than exegesis."

"I know that, Father."

"Do you apportion your time accordingly?"

"My study time—yes, Father. That memorizing of the Gospel of St. John was done in free time."

"Personalities do not enter into this matter, I suppose?" Martin was silent. "You do not study a subject for the sake of the teacher, you know, not in a seminary at least."

"One teacher can make a subject more interesting than another."

"Unquestionably. But we do not settle such matters by a subjective standard. See that you do not let your personal likes or dislikes run away with you."

The train's brakes began to jolt the string of cars to a stop. Father Stoner stood up. His face was ominous. "I have no notion at what hour Mr. Ward will return tonight, but I wish you to inform him that I desire his presence in my office immediately after breakfast. Leave a note to that effect on his desk."

"Yes, Father."

Father Stoner's lips tensed into a tight line, and a look of distaste and disillusionment came over his countenance. "Some people can never understand the significance of a rule or law unless the sanctions are applied."

They descended from the train and entered the waiting automobiles.



Rube surlily faced his friends.

"Well," demanded Steve impatiently, "What did he do to you?"

"Two weeks waiting on tables, and campused for a month."

Martin gave a low whistle. "That's tough. Still it's better than getting clipped," he condoled.

"His attitude was worse than getting clipped," declared Rube. "He wouldn't believe a thing I told him. We couldn't get an el train on time; they weren't running regularly."

"Why didn't you take a taxi?" asked Steve.

"That's what Quinn wanted to do. He was with me. I couldn't see myself laying out a couple of bucks for that."

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Steve in a despairing tone.

"Well, his people live near by and they had a car. We went back and told them about it and his brother drove us all the way in. The engine conked out around Glenside and held us up."

"I can't understand him not believing your story," said Steve.

"Neither can I," came Rube's sullen rejoinder.

"It's strange," put in Martin, "but he seems to have some ideas, too, about me and Father McClellan." He told them of his conversation with Father Stoner on the train. "He didn't mention any names, of course," he concluded, "but that wasn't necessary. It was plain that Father McClellan must have complained about me."

A long silence ensued. Abruptly Steve broke forth into speech. "I think," he announced grimly, "that something ought to be done about this." He turned abruptly away from them and started towards the house.

Martin ran after him. "Where are you going, Steve?" he demanded.

"Don't bother me." He gestured him aside. "I'll tell you later."

Steve finished speaking, and Father Stoner continued gazing at him as though wanting to make sure that the batteries of his indignation had completely run down. Finally he spoke. "And so, Mr. Kolesar, in your estimation the treatment of Mr. Ward was unfair."

"Yes," came the blunt reply.

"I admire your sense of loyalty, but, I am sure, you did not stop to consider that it was not necessary for Mr. Ward to go all the way uptown to obtain some food. There were eating places near by. Why he went so far, he has not explained to me. But, regardless of that, the fact remains that Mr. Ward was absent practically the entire night—a transgression that merits *ipso facto* expulsion. Under the circumstances, he is being dealt with very leniently."

Steve shook his head in stubborn denial. "It's the attitude you took, Father," he argued. "You practically called him a liar."

With studied deliberation, Father Stoner leaned forward and picked up a pencil; he looked at it for a while as though it was something he had never seen before, turned it in his fingers and began to tap the heel of it carefully on the desk. "Mr. Ward is at liberty to draw whatever implications he wishes from his talk with me. There is, I grant, a possibility that the el trains were not running on schedule last night, but there was no news in this morning's paper of any derangement of their usual schedule. Moreover, Mr. Ward's conduct in the past, has not been of the frank, aboveboard kind that would make for ready credence in his word."

"Ye gods, Father," blurted out Steve. "Rube is straight. He wouldn't tell a lie. You're making a mistake, Father."

The pencil snapped flat on the desk with a sharp click. Steve braced himself for a sudden outburst. None came. There was a pause, and then Father Stoner in the temperate, impartial voice of a judge, said: "A mistake in this matter is my responsibility, not yours."

"You are not giving him a square deal," doggedly retorted Steve. "For a thing he couldn't help he gets campused for two weeks."

"The facts of the case warrant that, at *least* that." He stood up. "And there will be no further discussion of the matter."

Steve did not budge. "Facts can be awful liars, I still maintain—."

"You may leave now, Mr. Kolesar."

Steve stood up, his eyes hot with anger, but the controlled gaze of Father Stoner did not waver. Steve whirled on his heel and left the room.

As the months wore on, Steve's admiration for Father Stoner went into a slow and steady decline. On countless occasions, in many small ways, the Prefect seemed to single him out for special observation and critical attention. Grimly, Steve went his way, determined that he was not going to be affected or subdued by the incessant surveillance.

Before departure for vacation the last two of the minor Orders were to be administered to the first-year Theologians. The call for Orders was due, and Martin was the first of the three to receive it. "Father Stoner dropped into my room last night," he told the others. "He gave me my call for Orders."

"You don't look like you are very happy about it," said Steve.

"There was one complaint—my Moral marks were too low! You know who that must have been."

"Father McClellan, eh?" observed Rube.

"I had an 80. Father Stoner said that, objectively, that was not a low mark."

"Father Stoner said that?" exclaimed Steve incredulously.

"You mean he went to bat for you?" ejaculated Rube.

"I guess he did, but he told me I could and should do better."

There was silence for a while and then Steve spoke. "Somehow or other you always land on your feet, Marty."

"Yeah—with an 80, after turning in enough work for a 95."

"Well, at least you got your call for Orders."

Martin looked at the discouraged faces of his friends. "I'm sorry, fellows. I didn't mean to put on a 'wailing at the wall' act."

That night the remainder of the Theologians, who had not as yet received their call, were keyed up for the arrival of Father Stoner. They knew that if they did not receive their call this evening they had been clipped. Within the rooms there was little studying being done, for all ears were attuned to the sound of footsteps and the opening of doors.

Steve rose promptly as his door opened. Father Stoner stepped into the room. He held a small black book. Quietly he faced Steve. The thumb of his right hand riffled the edges of the closed book. "Mr. Kolesar, on the occasion of our talk sometime ago, you exhibited a surprisingly headstrong attitude. What I said at that time I now repeat. Loyalty, courage are fine things. But for a seminarian and a priest they are not the first things. A truly humble man is basically a very loyal and courageous one. A leader must learn to obey. You have had that explained to you. In the face of that your attitude was capable of only one interpretation."

A muscle bulged tightly along the ridge of Steve's jaw, but he managed to hold back the storm of indignant protests that the Prefect's words stirred up. Quietly, Father Stoner watched him as though waiting for an outburst of temper. When it did not come, he began to speak again. "However, there has been no further indication of this attitude, and your industry and observance of the rules were excellent, so I herewith give you your call to the Orders of Lectorate and Acolyte."

"Thank you, Father." The words were low and controlled, giving no sign of the conflict within him, nor of how the joy of the occasion had been ruined by what the Prefect had said.

The door closed and the stately steps of Father Stoner faded down the corridor.

Rube sat in his room, his head bowed over the code of canon law strategically opened on the desk before him. But he did not see the book. He saw nothing at all; he felt nothing at all. All his senses were in abeyance, except that of hearing. His ears were attuned to one sound, a sound in the corridor, the sound of footsteps which moved from door to door. He heard them stop at the room next to his; the opening of the door. There was a sound of the door closing, and then footsteps. He sat rigid, tense, ready to spring to his feet as his own door opened.

Slowly the footsteps approached, and walked on past. He slumped back into his seat. All along he had felt that he would not be called and had made his plans accordingly; and yet he had hoped that consideration might be shown him, and he would have altered his decision if it had. Anger surged up in him. With one furious gesture he swept the book from the desk on to the floor, stood up, strode to the clothespress and snatched out a package of cigarettes. He flung open the window, and boldly lit a cigarette. In short fierce puffs the smoke streamed from his lips, while he fought with his anger and bitterness.

"Mr. Ward."

Rube spun about. Father Stoner stood in the doorway his eyes fastened on the cigarette in Rube's hand. For a moment he stood there, disapproval deep in his eyes, and something of sadness. Then he came into the room and closed the door. "I came here to give you your call for Orders," he said very slowly. "I came to you last because I wanted to have a talk with you. On more than one occasion, these past months, in small matters, there has been an indication of resentment on your part. At times I felt as though you had not sincerely accepted my previous warning but that you were passively resisting. It was hard to be sure, and so I had come prepared

to give you the benefit of the doubt." He pointed to the smoldering cigarette. "That changes matters."

"You mean I'm clipped?"

"Yes. Your call to Orders will be postponed. Dependent upon your consequent behavior, you may receive Orders with the next class in the fall."

The door closed.

Rube went over to the wastepaper basket and with one savage kick sent its contents hurtling about the room. He went back to the open window and lit another cigarette.

After a while the door edged open and Martin stole into the room. He stared blankly at the disorder. Rube turned and Martin's gaze fastened upon the cigarette dangling from a corner of his friend's mouth.

"I saw Father Stoner leaving," he finally managed to say. "Did he catch you smoking?"

Rube nodded, his eye fastened on the ragged smoke rings he was trying to blow.

"Are you clipped?"

Again Rube nodded assent.

Desperately Martin searched his face. "Talk, will you, Rube! What are we going to do?"

Rube grinned sourly. "There's only one thing left to do. It doesn't make much difference, Marty. I made up my mind some time ago."

"Made up your mind?" Incredulity filled the tones of his voice.

"Sure."

In one stride Martin was at his side. "No, you can't, Rube. It's not final. It's only a postponement; that's all a clip is."

"Not with me it isn't. It's final."

"You're angry now. You're not seeing things straight. Wait, won't you, Rube?" he pleaded. "After you cool off you'll think differently."

"Save your breath, Marty."

The grim finality of his voice was like a blow in the face. Martin turned away and slumped down on the edge of the bed. Dejectedly, he lowered his gaze to the littered floor, fixedly he stared at the thin, black, parallel lines that marked the tongue and groove joints of the bare boards. "Always Three," he muttered.

Rube wheeled about. "Skip it!" he ordered. "Don't get notions because of me. I suppose I had this coming to me, but that's the way it is, Marty. I've got to have things."

"It won't be always like this. After you're ordained you can have the stuff you want."

"After I'm ordained! It's three years till then, and after that what? A curate, for God knows how many years! By the time I can have my own car I'll be so old I won't care about it. No, Marty, this is not for me."

Intently Martin held his gaze. "You mean that you really do not want this any more, Rube?"

Rube turned away. He stood staring silently out of the window for a long time. When he spoke his voice was low. "I want it, Marty," he said, "I want it badly, but I can't have it. Steve was right. I can't grow up to it. Haven't you seen that, Marty?"

"It's not an overnight job, Rube."

"Who knows that better than I? You would think though that knowing what was wrong with me I could straighten it out. But I know now I can't, and that's—that's what made me break loose like this." He gestured about the disordered room.

"But Father Stoner thinks you can. He must; otherwise he would tell you to leave. The clip is actually another chance for you."

"I've got no kick about him," admitted Rube ruefully. "He's been just. Maybe he sees more in me than is there. I just can't make myself do what I want." Martin was ominously silent. Rube whirled about. "What are you thinking about, Marty?"

"Father McClellan," he blurted out.

Rube came over to him quickly. "I know what I'm doing, Marty. It's my decision. You make up your own mind, and forget me."

Martin looked at him. After a long pause he replied. "Yes, Rube. That's the way it has to be now."



## Chapter 20

MRS. MANNING came quietly into the unlighted front room. Martin sat at the window, his chin cupped in his hands, gazing out into the warm darkness of the city street. He had grown up and away from her. This quiet introspective youth was a stranger to her. The old love, the tender thoughtfulness were ever present, but the ready smile and the carefree buoyancy of former days were overlaid by a shadowy something that made her vaguely afraid.

She went up to him and put her arm about him. "Thinking big thoughts, sonny?"

He smiled slowly and leaned towards her. "Just mooning away, mother. It's too hot to do anything else."

"Maybe you should have gone to the country."

He looked at her. "All by myself?"

She kissed him. "You wouldn't miss your old mother, would you?"

"What do you mean old?"

"The gray hairs are coming."

"You'll never be old."

"Is that a hope or a promise?"

"It's more—a prophecy."

She smiled indulgently and pressed her cheek against his.

"You haven't forgotten how to say nice things," she whispered.

His eyes clouded, and he moved away from her. He had said many nice things this summer, but to what purpose?

His mother studied him for a moment. There were things she must question him about, and it was so important to choose the right moment. "When are Mrs. McBride and Alice coming back?"

"I don't know. The end of the month, I guess."

"You had a letter from Alice this morning—didn't she say?"

"No, she didn't."

Her voice was easy, casual. "She has become a very devoted correspondent."

Martin looked up at her, and then as quickly turned his glance away. She had noticed those daily letters from Alice, was worried about them.

"I suppose she's lonely. You know how it is, mom, a girl all by herself in a strange place. I—I guess you understand."

She cast a look of faint surprise at him. Alice was not alone, her mother was with her. Thoughtfully, she nodded her head. "Yes, I understand," came her soft response.

Patiently, she waited for him to speak, but no word passed his lips. It troubled her. There had been reticences about him before, but she had been able to read through them; this one baffled her. It had something of maturity in it and also something of secretiveness, or was it shame? It was that which caused her to fear.

She broke in on his thoughts. "You haven't made any preparations for returning, Martin."

"There's time yet."

"Only a few days. And there are things you wanted to buy," she reminded him.

"Let's not think about that until we have to, mother." There was a trace of irritation in his voice.

Tactfully, she changed the subject. "There's ice cream in

the refrigerator. Shall we have some?" He turned, smiling assent, and made a movement to rise. "Don't get up. I'll get it, and we will eat it here."

She moved away and Martin made no effort to follow her. His chin sank down again upon his folded arms, and his eyes grew pensive with the memories of the strange course that the summer had taken.

He had been recruited again to help out with the parish's summer theatricals. Joe had walked home with him one evening and had asked for the details about Rube's departure from the seminary. Alice was along, and Martin was loath to speak of the matter in front of her. In awkward, half-formed sentences the story had been given. Throughout the recital, Alice had maintained a tactful silence.

The three of them fell into the routine of returning home together from rehearsals, and Martin began to look forward to those friendly walks, for the interests of Alice and Joe took him away from an introspectiveness that was grown almost morbid.

One night Alice came up to him alone. "Joe's sick," she announced. "Will you be the gallant squire, Marty?"

"Why, sure," came his quick assent.

She put her arm through his, and he was pleasurably thrilled at this friendly little gesture. The McBrides had always been a cut above everyone else on the block, and throughout his boyhood Martin had looked at Alice through a worshipful haze. To have her walking now at his side, arm in arm, was, indeed, the fulfillment of a dream.

"You're pretty swell, Alice," he burst out.

She looked at him, surprised at his abrupt enthusiasm. "Am I? Nobody ever told me that before." She studied the eager brightness in his countenance. "Tell me why," she probed.

Martin blushed, at a loss how to evade the embarrassing truth. "Well, you keep giving up your evenings to take part in these shows. You could be going out to parties and on

dates. That's pretty swell, I think." He looked up at her shyly, and was taken aback to see the disappointment that overcast her features. "I mean it, Alice. It is really pretty big of you."

"Don't tell me that you don't know what's going on," she replied surlily. She darted a quick look at him, but his face was a blank of complete astonishment. "I'm sorry, Marty," she amended quickly, "I forgot you've been away."

"What is it, Alice?"

"Oh, I lost interest in all this parish stuff quite a while ago. As far as I'm concerned, it's just sophomoric silliness."

"But why are you doing it then?"

"It's my only chance to get out," she blurted forth. Her head was averted, as though not wanting him to see the indignation and shame that covered her countenance. "Dad took me out of the nuns' school and sent me to Empire State College. He wasn't going to have the same trouble with me that he had with Joe." She looked up at him. "Crazy, isn't it? He thinks the nuns are narrow and so he sends me to a secular college where I'll get a more liberal outlook. The school is up with the times, but he isn't. He's afraid I might want to be a nun, so he puts me in a secular college; and then he won't let me see anyone, so I'll wind up an old maid. It's—it's infuriating."

"Won't he let you out at all?"

"Only with Joe. It all started that vacation when he wouldn't let the rest of you come to our house. He arranged Joe's life, now he's going to do the same with mine. Joe isn't company. We're always arguing. Most of the things he talks about are strictly medieval, seminary stuff." She broke off abruptly. "I'm sorry, Marty," she said contritely, "I didn't mean to talk disparagingly of your seminary, but Joe irritates me with his dogmatic assurance."

"He's probably worried about the things you are being taught at that school."

"Of course he is. They startle him. They don't shock you, do they?"

"I don't know what they are, but—well, they haven't made you happy as yet, have they?"

"No; but it's not the fault of what I'm learning. It's the fault of my father. He's trying to run my life. I've got wider ideas of life than he has, and I want to live them. If I could only meet more people and talk things out, intelligent people."

Martin said nothing and she read his silence as understanding and sympathy for her lot. Slowly her hand slid forward and lay on top of his. "Marty, why don't you take me out some time?"

Embarrassedly, Martin looked away from the appeal in her face. He had no illusions. To her he was just a possible escape from the eternal vigilance of her father, but it flattered him that she should turn to him in her need. "I'd like to help you out, Alice, but do you think your father's going to be different towards me than the others? I'm a seminarian." The word called up obligations. "Besides, I'm not supposed to be going out with girls."

"Oh, bother! There's no harm in it. We're old friends."

"That wouldn't make much difference to—"

"Listen, Marty, I've got it. Invite Joe to a show or something, and I'll get him to take me along. I can coax him into it."

"You'd like that?"

"It's better than nothing. Joe is dull company."

It had gone on from there. At first Alice had remained a polite listener while Joe and Martin talked, but gradually she entered into their discussions and stood on equal terms with them. She became cheerful, even gay, and Martin not only found pleasure in her company, but looked forward with eager expectancy to their next meeting.

How much that expectancy was concerned with the prospect of seeing Alice alone, he did not fully realize until the

day that she and her mother departed for a vacation in the country. Joe and he had gone down to the Lackawanna Station to see them off. Mrs. McBride and Joe had entered the train, and Martin was assisting Alice up the steps when she suddenly turned, patted him gently on the cheek and then allowed the tips of her fingers to drift caressingly across his face. "For all the good times, Marty, I'm deeply grateful." It had been an intimate little whisper, a gracious gesture of gratitude; and then she was gone.

It stayed in his memory; and the days that followed were strangely empty, until her first letter arrived. That missive had been for him a startling revelation. In it had been a frank avowal of loneliness, of unrest and unhappiness. He had drawn so much pleasure from her presence, had seen so much of the bright side of her in these past weeks, that it shocked him to see how beneath the gay surface she was a prey to such darkness. His letter and ensuing ones strove to bring her to a lighter mood, but they were barren of success. Her replies became more impassioned in their protests of unhappiness, and all the wisdom that he had garnered in his few years of training and study was readily and diffusely offered, but seemed powerless to help her out of the melancholy and rebellion into which she had plunged. Reluctantly, he admitted to himself that he was unable to help her, and he could not see why he had failed.

Perhaps he had been presumptuous. He was not halfway through his training and here he was trying to straighten out the interior tangles of others. Further study and solitude might provide him with the answers needed. Alice had no one, really, to turn to in her doubts and questionings, and the thought of her helplessness induced in him a corresponding sadness; and yet it was a strangely satisfying sadness, for frequently in the midst of it he would find himself standing again, in memory, at the Lackawanna Station, feeling the light touch of her fingers, hearing the whispered words, and over it was the insistent

chugging of the trains—or was it the pulse throbbing dully in his temples?

He lifted his eyes. Across the street the subway battered its way up into the open, and his eyes became aware of the rushing torrent of lights and noise thundering past him on the other side of the street.

“Are you going to eat, or must I do double duty?” His mother was at his side.

“Gee, I didn’t know—” He picked up the plate and automatically began to spoon some ice cream into his mouth. It was drippy, half melted. “Good,” he declared. “How’s yours, mom?”

“I finished mine long ago.”

“You’re always ahead of me, mom.”

“Not always,” came the quiet rejoinder.

He looked up at her. After a moment he put down his spoon and went to her. His arm stole around her shoulders. “Always,” he said. She pressed her cheek against his. “Tomorrow we’ll get those clothes I’m needing. There are only a few days left.”

## *Chapter 21*

MARTIN came back to the seminary with a strange sense of finding port after a storm. The memory of the past year's struggle and trial had faded, and he saw the seminary in a new light. The veteran Professors and experienced Prefects, the raw recruits for Philosophy and the seasoned Theologians were bustling purposefully about, as though this were a huge camp readying itself for some tremendously vital engagement.

Thinking back he could see how this sense of continuous preparation, of readying oneself for a great conflict, had always underlain the outward calm of the seminary. The placid days of work and prayer were the training ground for combat. In them a soldier was to be formed, a new individual was to emerge, and necessarily so. For, in the contest that lay ahead, the example of one's self, of one's way of living was to be the most potent weapon of the fight. One was to go forth unworldly, into a very worldly world, and the unworldliness of the priest was to be the answer to so many questions that were being asked, a reminder for those who had forgotten, and an awakening for those who had never known. The sword of wisdom, the shield of virtue, the helmet of faith—these were the arms of their warfare; and yet, although he thought he possessed them, he had failed in his very first engagement.



Martin did not question their efficacy, he began to doubt his personal fitness.

The very first day after his return he sought out Father White and found an immediate and warm welcome. The blue eyes studied him from behind their spectacles. "You don't have that after-vacation glow, Martin. What's wrong?"

"I've been doing a lot of thinking during the vacation months, Father. Nothing seems to add up."

"If you give me the figures I may be able to do the sum for you."

At great length, Martin told of his attempt and failure to solve the unhappiness of another and of the doubts it had stirred up in him. He summed up the matter very frankly. "I've always hated unhappiness, Father. That was one of the reasons I came here. I wanted to fight it, and I thought that the priest had in his hands the weapons needed."

"He has, as far as there is any solution to that problem here below. That's one of the reasons for all the years of training. The priest has to find happiness for himself before he can give it to others."

Martin pushed his hand through his hair. "I haven't found it yet." He looked thoughtfully at the floor. "The studies, the routine, the discipline, they're all things on the outside. I guess it's what goes on inside of you that counts."

"And that is revolutionary, isn't it?"

"It's painful. It's like one piece after another of you dying."

"You have heard about that in retreat and in conferences, but when you face up to it in experience it's different, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's hard to give in to."

"Naturally. It's contrary to all the things that are inherent in you, the desire for ease, the craving to have things, the longing to be looked up to and loved. Having nothing you have all. That's when you can help others."

"I'm finding my way, Father, but I guess I'm awfully slow."

"The slowness means nothing. So long as you do have this

experience. So many never do. They live on the surface, all forms and no reality."

Martin slowly stood up.

"By the way, Mr. Manning, from what you've told me I judge that you saw this girl a number of times."

"I did, Father, but her brother was always along. She wrote me a lot of letters, too."

Father White was silent a moment. "What are your own personal feelings about her, if I may ask?"

Martin looked seriously at the Prefect. "I think, Father, that she is losing her faith."

The priest's eyes widened perceptibly and then a relieved expression covered his face. "Yes; yes," he agreed. "I believe you have diagnosed her difficulty correctly. You told her, I presume, the regulation about correspondence."

"Very clearly, Father. There is nothing else that I can do about the matter except pray for her, and, of course, study harder."

"That's good." He looked up at him. "One must be ever careful, you know. It happens, on occasion, that a relationship begins in the spirit, and ends—differently." Martin looked startled. Father White stood up. "You have acted discreetly enough in the matter, Martin." He patted his shoulder. "But a word of warning is never amiss."

That evening Martin saw Father McClellan walking in the garden. He went up to the priest and shook hands. "I'm glad to see you back, Manning," he said, his handclasp firm and friendly.

"Thank you, Father," he replied. "I'm glad to be back."

"Ready for another year in the trenches?"

Martin smiled. "Ready and eager, Father." It was strange, but there was no longer any sense of antagonism within him because of last year's disagreeableness. Perhaps the magnitude of the present problem, which the vacation experience had raised, had put in its true light the pettiness of the past one.

"That's fine." Father McClellan's voice was cordial, and Martin had not known that the priest's smile could be so charming.

The Theologians opened their books, settled back in their chairs, and awaited the professor's opening words. It was the first lecture in moral theology.

Father McClellan calmly surveyed the class. "For the benefit of the new group of Theologians," he began, "I would like to state that the decisions and decrees of various Church Councils will be quoted in the course of our lectures. I desire you, on all such occasions, to look them up. All the pertinent ones are contained in the *Enchiridion*. This is the most recent edition of it." He held aloft a red-covered book. For an appreciable space of time he stared at it. "Rather garish binding for a theological work—almost like a novel. In fact, last year I mistook it for one. Mr. Manning was consulting the *Enchiridion* in one of my lectures and I rashly accused him of reading a novel. They were unconsidered words and I wish to apologize for them, Mr. Manning." He inclined his head quietly in Martin's direction.

An awkward stillness held the room. Father McClellan put down the book, and smiled easily at the class. "The moral of the matter is—don't judge a book by its cover."

The tension in the room eased, and the lecture got under way.

Martin went straight from the lecture hall to Father McClellan's room. The priest smiled when he saw the face of his visitor. "Come in, Mr. Manning," he invited.

Martin entered, and stood awkwardly, wordlessly at the side of a chair.

"Won't you be seated?" asked Father McClellan kindly.

Martin sat down, lifted the fringe of his cincture into his lap and stared blankly at it. Abruptly he broke into speech. "I never felt so small in all my life, Father."

A faint twinkle came into Father McClellan's eyes. "Because of the hard things you have been thinking about me these past months?" Martin's eyes gave him his answer. "Under the circumstances that was completely understandable."

Martin shook his head. "But not excusable, Father. Father White had offered a possible interpretation of your action and I refused to accept it."

"You do understand now?"

"Of course, Father. By humiliations one becomes humble."

A glow of pleasure softened Father McClellan's face. "I am pleased and grateful that you understand. I prayed very hard for that."

"Why didn't you explain to me, Father? It would have made everything so much easier."

"That would have defeated the very purpose of it. Knowing that you were being humble in this case would have made you feel heroic. It would have just made for additional pride." His gaze met Marty's with deep seriousness. "I wanted to apologize as soon as you had pointed out the mistake I had made. You know now why I didn't. A tall building needs a deep foundation. A priest stands high. He needs humility."

"I know that now, Father, and—and I can't thank you enough."

With quiet determination Martin settled into the work of second-year theology. Steve made it a point to be with him as often as possible, and it became such a frequent thing for them to be seen together that their classmates dubbed them "The Inseparables." They made nothing of the soubriquet; and yet deep within each of them was the need for the other.

They became keenly interested in homiletics, the theory and practice of sermon construction. Together they studied the classic models, enthusing over the rounded rhythms of Massillon's sentences, the clarity of Bourdaloue and the grandeur of Lacordaire. They were spendthrift of their time and labor, realizing to the full that there could never be enough

grace and art, enough power of thought and precision of phrasing in the structure of their sermons.

The intensity of their interest was due, in great part, to the inspiration of their professor, Father Raymond Cannon, a compact, broad-shouldered individual. There was a wave in his bushy hair; and the broken line of his nose was adorned with pince-nez. Whatever lack there was in him of personal pulchritude was more than compensated for by a complete and ever-present self-assurance.

"If you should lose your trend of thought in a discourse," he explained to the class, "there is no reason to become excited. There's a device to remedy that defect. Take out your handkerchief, carefully and slowly, turn aside and cough into it, genteelly, refold it—but all the time keep repeating to yourself the last line." He gave them a demonstration. "There's a psychological law that operates through repeating the last sentence; and it will start up your next sentence for you." He adjusted his pince-nez. "Who is delivering the sermon next week?"

Steve's hand shot up.

"Your name, please?" requested Father Cannon.

"Kolesar," mumbled Steve.

"Speak up, man, speak up," boomed the priest. "'Faith cometh by hearing.'"

"Kolesar," half-shouted Steve.

"That's better. Keep your sermon down to fifteen minutes. At its conclusion we will assemble here to discuss it. That's all for today."

There is no more critical audience on the face of this wide earth than a group of seminarians. Their probing into abstruse dogmas tends to make them view a matter with disconcertingly cold and analytic eyes. And so, when the appointed day arrived, and Steve mounted the pulpit, there was reason for the tremor that invaded his knees. For weeks he had been laboring over his sermon; he had practiced it aloud in the

woods with only Martin as an audience; he had every gesture down perfectly; and yet, when he mounted the pulpit and faced the scattered group of fellow seminarians, he went weak all over. The sheen of Father Cannon's pince-nez glimmered dully from a shadowy corner in the rear of the church.

Steve passed his tongue several times over his dry lips, reached forward and grasped the edge of the pulpit with his big strong hands. "But the greatest of these is charity." It was not a plea; it was his text. "There is a great variety of topics about which the renowned Apostle to the Gentiles treats in his various epistles to the churches, but on none of them does he elaborate at such great length and with such fire of zeal and with such lyricism of language as on that of the theological virtue of charity."

The sound of his voice came echoing back to him. It did not sound like his voice. But why bother about that? The words were flowing forth, just as he had memorized them. He became aware of a rigidity in his arms and hands. At once he relaxed and allowed his hands to dangle over the edge of the pulpit. The gestures! He hadn't made a gesture yet.

"If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels," his right hand jerked upwards, "but do not have charity, I have become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." His right hand fell down in a gesture of emptiness. His eyes followed it. It was good, just as he had practiced it: the hand bent downwards from the wrist, the palm opened upwards, the fingers drooping towards the ground to denote the valuelessness of perfection of speech if it was not imbued with charity. He stared at the fingers, and a horrible, icy paralysis choked him from throat to toes. The next line, ye gods, what was the next line!

A fine cold perspiration was breaking out all over him. The next line, the next line! He mumbled the last words to himself to start his train of thought. A seminarian cleared his throat noisily at the long pause.

The uncomfortable Theologians, fidgeting at Steve's manifest distress, suddenly began to grin. Steve had turned slightly and fished in his cassock pocket. His hand came up with a large, neatly folded handkerchief. With painstaking precision he unfolded it, gave a thunderous cough into it, and then to complete the operation, absent-mindedly blew his nose!

In a silence, surcharged with explosive possibilities, he began to refold the handkerchief. Like a bolt from the blue, the next line jumped into his consciousness. "This is the inspired word of the inspired writer. Down through the echoing arches of the years has come to us this voice from on high, mellifluous with the song of its charity, immortal with the unchangeableness of its veracity."

He was fully back in stride now, the words running freely, authoritatively from his lips, his arms rising and falling in the gestures he had practiced so faithfully and long. For the first time he felt at ease and confident; there was an assurance running through him that at last he had captivated his audience. It was only in the final sentence, as he flung wide his arms and quoted St. Paul's immortal promise, "'So there abide faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,'" that he became aware of the handkerchief fluttering in his right fist.

Stupidly, he stared at it for an amazed moment, then crushed it into his pocket, and red-facedly stumbled from the pulpit.

The class made their way to the lecture hall. There was a great deal of squirming around and suppressed whispering. Steve, wiping the perspiration from his face, recognized the signs. They were loaded for bear.

Father Cannon stood up before the class, and there was an unhappy look upon his countenance. He adjusted his pince-nez. "Well, who are the critics?" Two seminarians promptly stood up. "Mr. Quinn may start," directed the priest.

A formidable notebook was opened and Mr. Quinn proceeded to the vivisection. "The delivery was extremely poor.

The gestures were jerky, the diction slurred." He elaborated, quoting phrases and words. "As to the material itself . . ." Several statements were sharply questioned; the propriety of certain phrases bluntly condemned. Summing up, Mr. Quinn declared, "The entire sermon was completely over the heads of ordinary people. Mr. Kolesar seems unable to distinguish between a sermon for the simple faithful and a theological paper for seminary discussion."

What Mr. Quinn began the other Theologians finished. The whole class chipped in with comments about microscopic details.

Puff Peters drew a laugh. "One of the devices explained in the textbook is the oratorical pause, Father. Mr. Kolesar's hands were hanging over the edge of the pulpit during the whole first part of the sermon. They are big hands, and all I could think of was—oratorical *pauses*!"

"A pun is the lowest form of humor," said Father Cannon.

Steve directed a lowering look at Puff.

"Speaking of devices, however," Father Cannon continued as he adjusted his pince-nez, "I fail to find any humor in making a travesty of the suggestions offered by me in the last lecture." He looked pointedly at Steve. "A little common sense would have dictated some other place as being more appropriate for it than the chapel."

Steve surged to his feet. "I wasn't attempting anything like that, Father. I lost my line."

"Well, if you did, you surely must have noticed the white flag you were waving in front of your face."

"No, I didn't. Not till the very end." Steve's voice was loud and vigorous in its protest.

Father Cannon did not make immediate reply. With patient carefulness he adjusted and readjusted his pince-nez, waiting for Steve to get his emotions under control. But Steve misjudged the professor's silence. "It's the truth," he maintained belligerently.



A ridge of muscle swelled along Father Cannon's jaw. He gave no other sign of irritation. His voice was firm but calm. "Kindly be seated."

Silenced, Steve dropped into his seat.

The class was no sooner ended than Steve barged hastily down the corridor in pursuit of Father Cannon. He drew up determinedly at the side of the priest.

The professor turned his eyes upon him. "Yes?"

"What I said, Father, about that handkerchief—it was the truth."

"I did not question the explanation you gave, Mr. Kolesar," he replied, "but I think you will agree, that the manner in which you presented it was not the best."

"I was just telling the truth."

Father Cannon nodded. "From the roof tops." A sudden twinkle came into his eyes. "I think you forgot that you were no longer in the pulpit. You were practically shouting." His hand took hold of Steve's rigid arm in friendly fashion. "But thanks anyhow for reminding the rest of the class about that handkerchief trick. It works, doesn't it?" He gave Steve's shoulder a farewell pat. "I've an appointment in the city." He walked briskly towards the stairway.

Steve went back to the lecture hall, tore up his sermon and flung it in the basket.

"What's the matter?" asked Puff. "Aren't you going to save that?"

"What for? It stinks."

Puff twinkled. "You must have believed what they told you."

Steve glared at him. "You lunkhead. You and your Minnesota wit—oratorical paws—wait till your turn comes. Believe me, I'll give you both barrels."

Puff grinned awkwardly. "It was just one of those things," he said appeasingly.

"Well, when I unload on you it will be the same."

Puff looked very unhappy.

## Chapter 22

IT WAS late of a Thursday morning, and, from his window, Father Stoner watched two figures manfully unloading jagged blocks of concrete from a truck. He looked at his watch; it was almost time for lunch. The two figures stopped occasionally to speak to one another—Manning and Kolesar. Permission had not been obtained from him for this work. He frowned at the watch in his hand.

"What's eating you all the time, Marty?" demanded Steve. "Alice."

Steve straightened up, slack-jawed with amazement. "Ye gods! What did you say? Alice!"

Martin reddened guiltily at the accusation in Steve's face. "Oh! It's nothing like that, Steve."

"No? What is it then?"

"Her father is giving her a pretty bad time."

"How come you know?"

Martin told him about his vacation. Steve listened attentively, and, when Martin had finished, he transfixed him with a condemnatory glance. "You've got a crush on her."

"Man alive," retorted Martin disgustedly, "be your age."

"You're thinking of *her*, not of her problems."

"That's not true, Steve."

"Quit kidding yourself. You're the guy with a problem, and

your problem is Alice." Martin shook his head stubbornly in dissent. "She's been making a play for you, dope. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

"Alice? For heaven's sake, Steve! She doesn't know I'm alive—not in that sort of way. You know how Joe is; thinking only about himself most of the time. She needs someone to talk things out with, like a—a real brother."

"Oh yeah? That's what most girls are looking for—a brother. O brother!"

With many a grunt and heave, they lifted some blocks of concrete off the truck.

Martin found a pleasant glow in the idea of Alice being interested in him. But, of course, it was not true. It was just Steve's imagination. Ever since Dick's defection everything that wore skirts had become a grave peril in Steve's eyes.

"Heave, will you?" exhorted Steve.

They wrestled the concrete block to the side of the pond. Steve straightened up and looked at Martin. "'A girl is just a girl,' Marty, 'but a good cigar is always a smoke.'"

"Suffering catfish, Steve, you're dreaming."

"It's all in your mind, I tell you, Marty. What you've got to do is keep plugging away at work like this. It will cure you."

"I'm so tired now I can hardly lift my chin," protested Martin.

"Well, let's knock off. It's time for lunch anyhow. We'll get back at it again, right after we've eaten."

They washed and went to chapel for the particular examen. The exhausting work had been what Steve wanted and needed. Ever since the disagreeable flurry with Father Cannon he had been out of sorts. He needed to get his hands on reality, something tangible and hard, that he could bend to his will, something he could dominate. In that way alone could he relieve the pent-up feelings within him.

Martin, kneeling tiredly in his pew, tried to make his partic-

ular examen, but the things that Steve had said kept intruding on his recollection. There could be a grain of truth in some of them. Looking back, he could see how all his consideration of Alice's unhappiness had been bound up with memories of her. He would have to make an end of that.

The Angelus was said and they trooped into the dining rooms. He ate hungrily, for the work had sharpened his appetite.

They rode out in the truck to the half-demolished fence and attacked their work with renewed vigor. The iron piping that did for fence posts was sunk in blocks of concrete. Steve severed the piping close to the concrete and Martin toiled with pick and spade unearthing the cumbersome masses of hardened cement. "What's the idea of the gloves?" asked Steve.

"My hands are getting sore. That stuff is pretty rough. You ought to get a pair too, Steve."

"I can't work with them." Steve had torn the skin of several knuckles, and his bruised right thumb was wrapped in adhesive tape. "I like the feel of the rocks in my hands anyhow." He grunted as he heaved his burden up on the truck.

"You'll bust a suspender button yet, Steve."

"Let it bust."

As the afternoon progressed the air sharpened with the chill of an autumn afternoon. "This is a kind of crazy way to spend a free day," said Martin.

"It's swell. I'm beginning to feel all right again." He held up his dirty, patched hands. "Oratorical paws!" he laughed.

"Gentlemen, my congratulations!" They spun about. Father White's spectacles glowed genially at them and he held his hat aloft in a salute. "This is a job that long needed doing."

Steve beamed acknowledgment of the compliment. "Father Hoffman asked for volunteers, Father, so we jumped at the chance. It's fun."

"It looks like rather rugged fun; and on your own time, too," he commended.

"Oh, we don't mind," came Steve's generous response. "The ponds will be needed soon for skating and the edges are in a bad way, so we're shoring them up with these blocks."

"Work for others always has a special blessing on it. Keep happy." Father White sauntered away.

Steve looked after him. "Now there's a man who always makes me feel good, Marty."

"Salt of the earth," agreed Martin.

Stirred by the recognition of their self-sacrificing labors, they attacked the remaining line of posts like soldiers going against an enemy position.

"What astonishing industry!" said a quiet voice.

They looked up. Father Stoner stood calmly before them, tall, precise, in top coat and biretta.

"Good afternoon, Father," they chorused.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. Is this a work of supererogation?"

Martin tugged uncomfortably at his gloves. "Yes, Father. We volunteered to do this for Father Hoffman."

"He wants the pond shored up before the water freezes over," explained Steve.

"Exemplary. This has been going on all day?"

"Yes, Father."

"There is only the matter of permission that has been neglected."

Steve looked blankly at Martin, and then swiftly back to Father Stoner. "Father Hoffman told us to go ahead, that—"

"Father Hoffman does not dispense permissions for this sort of work."

"But I was trying to say," persisted Steve, "that he told us he would get permission from you."

"He did? As yet he has failed to see me." He let the silence draw out uncomfortably long. "You may stop this work now."

"We've only got the job half finished, Father," protested Steve.

Father Stoner's gaze fixed upon him, his eyebrows slightly raised. There was a reminder, almost a warning in the fixity of his stare.

Undismayed, Steve persisted. "May we finish the job if I get him to go to you now for permission?"

The voice of the Prefect dropped a single uncompromising syllable upon the air. "No."

Steve's face reddened and his hands clenched. "We kind of thought that this work was a sacrifice, something for the community, Father, giving up our free time. We didn't intend to upset—"

"Obedience is better than sacrifice, or haven't you heard that?"

Steve clambered up onto the truck and Martin got in beside him. In silence they drove the truck to the garage, Steve's jaw muscles bulging spasmodically and ominously. His feelings at last under control, he ventured an emphatic opinion. "You'd think that a fellow could do what he wants at least with his free time." He glanced at his silent companion. "Well, don't sit there like a lunk, say something."

"I feel like something left over from last week's wash."

"Huh! I'll bet you're glad he made us quit."

"I'm tired, if that's what you mean, but I don't like being ordered around any more than you do."

"Sorry, Marty. I know you don't."

They put away the truck. "Your hands sure took a beating, Steve."

Steve glanced at them. "That's nothing. I can take it."

"I guess we'd better see Father Hoffman and tell him what has happened," suggested Martin.

"Not on your life," came Steve's emphatic retort. "You go and tell him if you want to. I'm going to try and dig up a bite to eat."

The fates were unkind to Steve. The following morning he was the first one called upon in liturgy period. Father Carroll, a small, mild-faced man with honey-colored, curling hair, was instructing the class on the duties of the master of ceremonies for Solemn High Mass. His life was an unceasing, outspoken warfare against the crudities with which American youth assaulted the ritualistic dignity of the sanctuary.

Steve stepped forward and accompanied Father Carroll to the foot of the improvised altar. The first duty of the master of ceremonies was to receive the birettas of the three officiating priests. Steve extended his hand, and Father Carroll drew back in shocked surprise. "What have you been doing with your hands, Mr. Kolesar?"

Steve looked wonderingly at his hands. "Nothing. Oh, that! I smashed my thumb on some rocks yesterday."

Father Carroll faced the class and held up Steve's hand as though it were something he had discovered underneath a rotted board. "Gentlemen, behold!"

The class looked and could not restrain itself. The broken fingernails, the open blisters, the patch of adhesive enveloping the blue-black, swollen thumb. They broke out into laughter, and, as usual, Puff's led all the rest.

Father Carroll allowed the laughter to subside, and then he took them to task. "Gentlemen, I have repeatedly told you about the care of your person. You know the significance and sacredness of the functions of the priest at the altar. To venture into the sanctuary with one's hands in such a condition evidences a truly culpable slovenliness. If you behave this way in the seminary what can we expect of you as priests?"

"I was fixing up the ponds yesterday, Father, so that the rest of the seminarians could have some skating this winter. That's the reason my hands are like this."

The severe expression of Father Carroll's face abruptly altered. "That was generous of you." He spoke sincerely and his right hand came up in a little gesture of commendation.

"May the others profit by your example. But—you should have remembered to care for your hands."

"You can't haul rocks and take care of your hands," retorted Steve bluntly.

"You could have worn gloves."

"Gloves?" Steve gave a contemptuous snort.

Father Carroll's face reddened slightly. "Yes, gloves. They have been used before."

Steve opened his mouth to voice his complete opinion on the matter of gloves, but the professor with a quiet little gesture waved him to his seat. Steve sat down. Angrily, he stared at his battered hands. A man did not have to have dainty fingers to be a good priest. The Apostles were fishermen, most of them, and he could not visualize them flaunting trim fingernails before the eyes of the first Christians. The early missionaries of America, Jogues, Brébeuf, Lalemant—he had read their stories: how they had fought their way into the interior of a savage wilderness, and had labored mightily, with their own hands, to build their rude chapels. He could not imagine them possessing lily-white digits. The appearance of a man's hands was only incidental; what a man did with them was important. What irked him was that no opportunity was allowed him to voice these facts, to defend his own position. The whole system was shot through with one killing, blinding requisite—*submission*.

Steve came by ideas rather slowly, but once formed they were hard to dislodge. He told Martin of his discovery. "The whole thing is this, Marty: submit and you're in. You don't have to think, you don't have to be outstanding in any way—they don't want real leaders, they want sheep."

"You've got to obey before you can command."

"Ye gods, Marty, don't *you* start!"

"I was only trying to help, Steve."

"O.K. But this blind obedience is all wet. I'm not a piece of machinery. I'm an intelligent being. The profs and Prefects



are not infallible. There are two sides to every deal. At least there used to be. But here—"

"There are still two sides, Steve," cut in Martin, his voice very firm.

"Yeah; the professor's side—and the wrong side."

"You've forgotten about that trouble I had with Father McClellan last year, Steve. Don't you remember how wrong I was about that?"

"That was different; he was giving you a chance to put into practice the things you've got to preach. He was training you for life, for action."

"Yes; but I didn't know it at the time, Steve. He didn't tell me till I had practiced it. Father Carroll was doing the same thing with you."

"This is a question," went on Steve unheedingly, "of the spirit and the letter. And what I want to know is how a fellow is to keep the spirit of his vocation when all they pound into you is the letter of it?"

Martin knew Steve. Any further efforts on his part would lead to a windy, profitless dispute. "Look, Steve," he counseled, "why don't you talk the whole thing over with Father Hoffman? He's your director, isn't he?"

Steve considered that a moment. "I guess I will. He usually keeps his feet on the ground."

Father Hoffman listened to Steve's recital, and then smote the bald spot atop his head with the palm of his hand. "Sour is life, Mr. Kolesar," he said with a sympathetic smile. "What you say is true; but to enforce the letter of the law is Father Carroll's job—and of all the other professors, too. You've got to be perfect in both the letter and the spirit to be a perfect priest. Suppose some of us do stress too much the letter of the law; if your main duty was to teach and enforce it, you might become the same way."

Steve brushed that consideration aside. "There's no personal

dignity left to a man, Father, and no leaders can be built that way. I don't want to be a sheep. The training's all wrong."

Father Hoffman gave him a whimsical smile. "You think so?"

"Yes, I do."

"Christ 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.' That is the soul of Christ's leadership."

"I can't see the difference between this submission and outright slavery," doggedly insisted Steve.

"Slavery? Well, it was what *He* chose."

Steve thought it over in meditation, at prayer, in the hours of silence, and he came to realize how the law of subservience bound every one; the businessman was the creature of business; the workman was yoked to his labor; the lover was the slave of the loved one; but that did not make matters any easier for him. Each new demand for obedience that the professors or regulations made, awoke in him a spirit of contradiction. With increasing eagerness, he awaited the hours of recreation. He plunged into the freedom of games, hoping by physical effort to find escape from his inward conflict. Under his capable direction, regular leagues were organized, and team competition grew spirited and keen.

Late in January, the championship hockey team of the Theologians arranged to play the Philosophers. The Thursday afternoon set for the contest was crisp, clear and cold, and the pond was lined with mittened and muffled spectators. The game came up fully to expectations. There were spills and wild showers of shaven ice as the speeding players slashed to sudden stops; there were the crack of sticks and the thud of body collisions. Through the thick of it roared Steve, like a delirious Cossack, taking punishment from stick and puck, and dealing it out in full and overflowing measure. The Theologians won by the small margin of one goal; and it was Steve who rammed home the decisive tally.

In the basement, where the lockers and showers were situated, the players pulled off their equipment, rubbed their cold feet, while they reviewed the highlights of the game. Steve and Martin sprawled on a bench, soaking up the warmth of the room. Suddenly Steve sat up. "Suffering cats, something's hurting!" he exclaimed, and pulled down his stocking. A long blue welt was slowly forming about a gash. "Who gave me that crack?" He thought for a moment. "I remember. It was Kelly's skate."

"That time he piled into you?"

"Yeah—hey, Kelly. See this? I owe you one."

"I was trying for your head," retorted Kelly, "but I knew there was no feeling there."

Steve laid hold of him and playfully pummeled him. He felt very good after the victory.

"Better run up to your room and put some iodine or something on that," advised Martin pointing to the cut in Steve's leg.

"It's starting to stiffen. I guess I'd better," he agreed.

Steve toiled up the stairs to his room and tended to his injury. It was almost time for study period, and he saw no reason for rushing down four flights of steps for his shower, when there was one so conveniently at hand.

At the end of the fourth-floor corridor were two guest rooms with a communicating bath. It was forbidden for the seminarians to use this bathroom; and to deter any of the adventuresome, the doors were kept locked. That morning, however, the porter had cleaned the rooms and carelessly forgotten to lock one of them. Steve, noticing the door standing slightly ajar, had thoughtfully closed it.

A quick glance up and down the corridor showed the coast to be clear, and in a few strides Steve was inside the guest room.

There was no fear of detection in Steve's mind. The Prefects, like the rest of the professors, were creatures of habit,

and Steve knew that at this hour of the day Father Stoner would be pacing the corridor of the second floor, saying his breviary.

And at that precise moment, Father Stoner *was* on the second floor, pacing sedately along, but in the company of Monsignor Barrington. A new seminary was being opened in an adjacent diocese, and Monsignor Barrington, its first rector, was in need of some ideas and practical principles upon which to model the institution entrusted to his care. He could think of no more fitting place to obtain them from than St. John's Seminary, for it had a national reputation, not only because of the learning of its professors, and the quality of its graduates, but also because of the excellence of its discipline. He had arranged to spend several days on the premises to see the seminary in actual operation. With justifiable pride, Father Stoner conducted him down the immaculate corridors and up the winding stairs to the guest room on the fourth floor. From the window of the sitting-room Monsignor Barrington gazed out on the snow-covered garden. "A splendid view from here, Father, a splendid view."

Father Stoner led him away from the window. "The gardens are something of a seminary boast, Monsignor," he agreed. "This is your bedroom, Monsignor."

"Comfortable looking, Father, very comfortable."

"And the bathroom is—" The door did not yield to Father Stoner's pressure. It was locked. He rattled the knob, and, when no answer was forthcoming, he inclined his ear towards the panel. There was a faint sound of running water. He turned quickly. "The door seems to be locked, Monsignor. It's an adjoining bath, but it will be closed off for your exclusive use during your stay, of course." He led his guest back to the sitting-room. "If you will wait just a moment I'll have the bathroom opened."

"Surely, Father, surely." He took his satchel to the window and began to dig around in it for his breviary.

Father Stoner stepped determinedly out of the room and went to the door of the adjacent room. From a key ring he selected a key and inserted it into the lock, failing to notice it was already unlocked. He entered the room swiftly, leaving the key in the lock. He strode up to the bathroom door and seizing the knob gave it a sudden twist.

Monsignor Barrington, busily rummaging in his satchel, did not see the hulking figure that emerged from the bathroom and noiselessly slipped past him. With swift strides it was out of the room and into the corridor; for a split second it paused at sight of the key protruding from the lock of the adjoining room; with a flick of the fingers it turned the key, and then fled in the direction of the Theologians' rooms.

It was the thumping on the door that made Monsignor Barrington straighten up. The bathroom door was open and the sounds seemed to be coming from there. He crossed the moist floor of the bathroom and drew the bolt. Father Stoner stood facing him, an angry glint in his eyes.

"Did you lock yourself in, Father?" asked the Monsignor.

"I—I left the key in the lock," came the evasive reply. "Did someone come through here?"

"Did someone— Oh, I see. I was busied unpacking my things. I'm afraid I didn't notice if anyone did."

Father Stoner's lips tightened. "Would you mind finishing your unpacking, Monsignor? The bathroom needs to be set in order and I'll arrange to have it tended to at once."

"Surely, Father, surely."

Father Stoner strode from the room, retrieved his keys from the lock of the adjoining room, and then made for the quarters of the Theologians. Unceremoniously he swung open the first door that he came to. Mr. Manion sat on his bed absorbed in the task of pulling a size ten sock on a size eleven foot. Father Stoner's eyes narrowed. "Mr. Manion, have you just taken a bath?"

Mr. Manion stood up, the sock half on. "Yes, Father. We had a hockey game."

"Where did you take this bath?"

There was no doubting the innocent amazement in the seminarian's wide open stare. "In the bathroom—you know, the bathroom."

"Downstairs?"

"Yes, downstairs. That's where it's always been, Father."

The door closed on Mr. Manion's amazement. Father Stoner thrust his way into the next room. "Mr. Wharton—Glory be to God!"

"I—I didn't expect you—" began the stupefied youth.

"Is it your custom to stand around your room *in statu naturae purae?*"

"You didn't knock." He pulled a towel around him. "I just finished my shower, Father."

"Where did you take it?"

"Where did I take it? Not here if that's what you mean."

"In the shower room?"

"Of course, with twenty other—"

The door closed abruptly. At the next room Father Stoner knocked briefly, and then entered. Steve, fully dressed in cassock and cincture, was combing his hair.

"Mr. Kolesar."

He turned to face Father Stoner. "Yes, Father."

"Come with me." Father Stoner spun about, and so missed seeing the sudden blank look that came into Steve's face. Steve laid down the comb and followed him. "Someone has been using the bathroom in the guest's room," explained Father Stoner as they walked down the corridor. "Would you mind mopping it up, so that Monsignor Barrington may use it?" He handed him the keys. "Go in from the adjoining room. You know where the mops are kept?"

"Of course, Father."

"Hurry up, please."

Steve turned away, but he did not hurry. He could not afford to. A hasty stride might have disclosed an absence of trousers beneath his cassock.

That evening at the close of dinner Father Stoner stirred up a minor commotion by announcing in a stern voice that the student who had been guilty of using the guest's bathroom should present himself at his office.

The "lights out" signal had sounded and the squares of illumination blinked out, one after another, down the long narrow corridor. Only the transom over Steve's door continued to show a light. He sat at his desk, his head cupped in his hands, staring unseeingly at the books before him.

It had been such an insignificant little incident, and circumstances had turned it into a horribly awkward affair. The voice of Father Stoner outside the bathroom door had panicked him for a moment. His locking of the door as he fled had been merely an unthinking reflex. There had been no malice in it. The Prefect would have caught him if he had not locked the door.

Impatiently, he shrugged his shoulders. What was done, was done. He could see no reason to admit his misdeed. No one would suffer if he remained silent. To admit now that he was the culprit would only make him look small and deceitful in the eyes of the Prefect. And that he could not bear to think of. For, despite the difficulty that he had felt in submitting to Father Stoner's demands, there underlay it an inexplicable yet definite sense of admiration for the man.

His door made a slight noise as it opened. "Mr. Kolesar."

Steve stared at Father Stoner framed in the doorway, reproof exuding from every lineament of his countenance. He stumbled to his feet. "Yes, Father?"

The Prefect's hand stole into the front of his cassock and drew forth a watch. He allowed it to drape itself over the back of his fingers, the face towards Steve.

"I didn't hear the 'lights out' signal, Father"

"You are the only one who did not."

"Sorry, Father."

The door closed. Father Stoner walked back to his room, and with his hand on the knob of his half-opened door he looked back. Steve's light blinked out, leaving the corridor in complete darkness.



## Chapter 23

THE weeks slipped by in flowing smoothness, and spring-tide, a long succession of fog-filled mornings and dank, drear afternoons, enveloped the earth. Day after day, Steve studied the joyless vista of the garden from his window, and at long last a faint, fresh, hesitant green began to cover the lawns as life thrust upwards from the deep dark of the loam. Strange, how it took more darkness than light to bring about a resurgence of life, and stranger still that in him there was no quickening of spirit, but only the deepening of a vast discontent. Things had been dark enough and dull enough these past weeks. All the adventure seemed to have gone out of life, his bright dreams of leadership had faded. Long he stood at his window staring at the drabness of the still unclothed trees, the blotches of bare flower beds, the lawns with faint patches of green showing. A bird whistled, shrilly clear and challenging, and it awoke in him the memory of the time when he had visioned himself bright-eyed and strong, heading a glorious crusade.

He shook his shoulders irritably, as though the physical act would dislodge the inward discontent, and went in search of Martin.

"What's the idea of all the fasting this Lent?" he chided Martin. "You're looking as peaked as a soda biscuit."

"My health is all right, Steve."

"And the headaches?"

"Haven't had one for months." He looked at Steve with a curious intentness. "Aren't you fasting?"

"Not the regular fast. I feel all dragged out by 10:00 A.M. if I do." He noticed Martin's strange look. "Oh, I'm doing other things. What are you thinking of?"

"*'Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis,'*" quoted Martin.

"Times change and we change with them—so what? You've changed a lot yourself."

Martin looked at him in frank surprise. "Have I?"

"Plenty. You're getting to be closer than a mousetrap. You never open up at all around the other fellows."

Martin digested this revelation for a moment. "I kind of get lost when there's a bunch around talking," he admitted. "I listen and wonder. Things don't seem to bother them or stick with them. You get what I mean?"

"Yes. They're normal."

"They will kick a question around just for the fun of opposition, or to hear their own voices. Nothing seems to trouble them. They go into their studies and recreation and do a job on it, whereas—"

"Whereas you keep doing a job on yourself."

"Yes, I guess that's right." He waited a moment. "You're doing the same thing, too, aren't you, Steve?"

"I'm doing a job, but I don't think it's on myself," he replied moodily.

After a silence Martin said quietly, "You have changed, too."

"A fellow has to change. We were a goony lot when we first came here; wild-eyed with ideas for saving civilization, crusaders with flying banners, we were going to wipe away the tears of the world. We had to come down to earth some-

time. There is no growth if there's no change." He clipped off the words concisely.

Martin did not voice his reply. Deterioration is a change, too; but he felt he had no right to express that thought. Passing judgment on the actions of others was so easy, and yet the wellsprings of actions are so mysteriously deep that one could be profoundly wrong.

There had been a letter from Joe condemning Alice for her rebellious attitude towards her father. She had taken to going out with Dick merely to antagonize her father. Martin knew the injustice of Joe's condemnation, for he was aware of the loneliness and dissatisfaction within the girl, of her seeking for true values and how her father's narrow viewpoint bound her.

The confining rains of spring at last ended, and when the first clear Thursday appeared Martin and Steve were prepared to enjoy it to the full. There were a number of bicycles available for those who wished to have an all-day outing, the established procedure simply requiring that there be at least four in the party of cyclists.

Steve presented the names to Father Stoner and obtained permission for their trip. Along with it he was appointed leader of the excursion, and so the duty devolved upon him to supervise the conduct of the excursionists and report their return.

The day was bright and warm, and Steve at once set a brisk pace for the group. They had gone about a mile when the persistent honking of an automobile horn drove them to the roadside. A touring car, gaily decorated with pennants, flashed past them.

"Almost ran me in the ditch," complained Martin.

"Some of those wise guys from the university," said his companion.

The University of Pembroke, several miles distant from the seminary, was a continuous source of mortification for the

seminarians. For some unaccountable reason, its undergraduates were invariably moved to boisterous merriment, snide remarks and catcalls whenever they caught sight of the sedately garbed seminarians on their walks.

Steve, pedaling industriously some distance ahead of the others, cast a look over his shoulder at the sudden loud blaring of the klaxon in back of him. Abruptly he swerved aside. The car kept abreast of him, edging him further and further off the road. The scrawny faced youth at the wheel grinned triumphantly, displaying an assortment of golden bridgework. His companion, tricked out in the height of college fashion, pulled a straight-stemmed pipe from between his teeth and, leaning over the side of the car, yelled stridently at Steve: "Get off the road, you black-legged punk!" and then spat at him. The car belched a cloud of gas fumes and swept away.

Steve's face blazed a raging red. He crouched over his handle bars and scorched along in futile pursuit, while the collegian, turned in his seat, kept gesticulating insultingly for the laboring pursuer to hurry and catch them.

A sudden screech of the brakes almost threw the collegian through the windshield. He let out a curse, and turned angrily on the driver, but the anger abruptly went out of him. They had come to a railroad crossing, and a string of freight cars was lumbering across the tracks.

Steve leaped from his bicycle and plunged towards the car. His left hand plucked the collegian forth bodily and his right fist drove viciously upwards. There was a sound like fresh meat thwacking down on a chopping block, and the collegian crumpled to the pavement. Steve picked him up and threw him into the back seat.

"I didn't say anything, I didn't say anything," squealed the driver. But Steve had already laid hold of him. He slapped his big-boned hand harshly, cruelly across the gold-toothed smirk. "You scrawny louse! You..."

"Lay off, Steve, lay off." Martin had hold of his arm.

"I'll knock that golden tooth down his throat."

With difficulty they managed to drag him away, and it took hours of riding before his temper cooled. They stopped at an ice cream parlor, and the last vestiges of Steve's anger evaporated. The outburst seemed to have done him good. He became very genial, and for the rest of the trip he was the bluff, kindly Steve whom Martin knew so well.

They got back rather late and Steve at once reported their return with the traditional formula: "We have returned from our trip, Father, and the rules were observed."

Father Stoner looked up casually from his writing. "There must be a mistake." He waited, but Steve said nothing. Father Stoner put down his pen. "Father Rector had a phone call an hour ago from the President of Pembroke University. Two of their students were manhandled by our seminarians, one of them rendered unconscious. The culprits were four seminarians on bicycles. You were the only group that took a bicycle trip today." He waited. "Well?"

"They called me a black-legged punk. I pasted one of them and slapped the other fellow's mouth."

"Hm! The rules were observed."

"We're not supposed to take a thing like that lying down, are we?"

"The rules were observed. Evidently your interpretation of observing rules is a very elastic one."

"Well, what's a fellow supposed to do?"

"We are not training prize fighters here. Your conduct—think of it a moment!—assaulting people on the highway. Do you see anything Christlike in that?"

"Christ used a whip on the money-changers, didn't he?"

Father Stoner raised his eyebrows. "What a parallel! The parity is conspicuous by its absence. Christ defended the honor of God's house. You were venting a personal pique."

"He insulted me and I'm a cleric, a representative of the Church. Just because we're cooped up here doesn't mean

we're a bunch of cream puffs. We've got a tougher life than they have. They can't push us around. The Church isn't dead and buried. It's the church militant."

"Not as militant as all that! These matters have been treated in class *ex professo*. You should have clearer notions than that. If you can't take a gibe, an insult, you still have a long way to go. Against a physical attack you could defend yourself. An attack against the teaching of the Church or the Person of God you are bound to repulse—but not necessarily with your fists."

"I still say he had it coming."

Father Stoner's lips tightened into a thin straight line. "You are rather pronounced in your judgments, Mr. Kolesar. It has been your notable defect in the past, and evidently any improvement that has been made has been merely a surface improvement. I will see you again about this matter."

For some fifteen minutes the faculty had been engaged in spirited debate. At length, the Rector, a Lincolnesque figure, stood up and in a bottomless bass voice announced, "This discussion keeps beating back and forth about the seminarian's admissibility to the Subdiaconate. You are missing the point." He opened a booklet and read: "'Chapter 22 of the Regulations. Faults Rendering One Liable to Expulsion. Section 4. To abuse, threaten, or strike anyone.'" He closed the book. "Plainly the case of Mr. Kolesar is one of expulsion."

There was complete silence for a moment and then Father Carroll spoke up. "I agree with Father Rector. The regulation is explicit. There can be no other recourse except dismissal."

"I disagree." The heads of the assembled priests turned to face Father Stoner's grim visage. "This is no normal case, Father Rector. Most of the Fathers sensed that and for that reason did not appeal to the letter of the regulations."

"To close your eyes to the rules will stultify the entire meaning of discipline," boomed the Rector's reply. "The

plain fact stands that Mr. Kolesar struck two young men, and in public."

"Perhaps it was needed."

"Are you countenancing this type of conduct?"

"No, and neither that of the young men who provoked it. Expulsion for Mr. Kolesar would be a tacit approval of the conduct of the college men."

"But the regulations," interposed Father Carroll.

"Have you never heard of an exception, Father? This is by way of exception, I assure you, not habitual procedure."

"*'The letter killeth, the spirit quickeneth,'*" quoted Father McClellan softly.

The brow of the Rector furrowed in thought. "As I recall," he finally rumbled, "there has been trouble with Mr. Kolesar before. Doesn't this incident bear out the fact that he is of a contentious, refractory disposition?"

"It rather indicates undue provocation," replied the Prefect.

A deep meditative grumble came forth from the Rector's throat. "A headstrong priest can become insufferably arrogant and do untold harm."

"I am aware of that. But he can also become a tremendous force for good. For that reason I put the question of his admission to the Subdiaconate, and not of his expulsion."

The eyes of all the priests were fixed in surprise on Father Stoner, for such clemency from him was a rare thing in their experience.

The Rector directed a piercing glance at him. "You do not fear to start a precedent?"

"No, Father Rector, I do not. For one thing, the provocation that caused this incident will hardly be offered again."

The story of Steve's exploit made the rounds, and overnight he became the most talked-of man in the seminary. But the champion of lost causes went through it all with apathetic indifference. He had left Father Stoner's room with rebellion

surging within him, yet fully aware that the words of the priest had been the truth.

He had been told these things before, and he had enthusiastically accepted them. Why then did the practice of them set up such opposition within him? It was making a continuous struggle out of life, fighting himself, emptying himself, reducing himself to a zero. The words of Father Hoffman were no longer a pious quotation to tide him over a passing difficulty; they had become a reality, personally and literally related to himself, a plain statement of the price that had to be paid for the leadership to which he aspired. Like a sombre cross they stood bleak and bold above him, the shadowy import of them stretching forth and darkening all the days of his living, an impalpable yet ever-present burden, for the weight of the opposition was his very own self. The heroism of Calvary was stupendously appealing, but the road that climbed it was aggravatingly slow and long and sown with painful dyings. Each step was over one's dead self. To die for others, one must first learn to live only for others; and to live only for others one had to die to one's self; and that was a dying more painful than death, for in it was no acclaim from others, it was a hidden-away dying.



## Chapter 24

IT WAS with pronounced apprehension that Martin waited for the call to the Subdiaconate. He was not concerned for himself, but for Steve. Father Stoner had not assigned any punishment to Steve, and that meant the matter was under consideration as a possible reason for refusing him the call to Orders.

The ominous day arrived and the dread footsteps were listened for as they went from room to room. Martin could hardly wait for the end of the study period, so that he could find out what was to be the fate of Steve. He caught up with him in the corridor. "Did you get the call, Steve?" he whispered.

Steve looked at him and the open concern showing in his face. "Yes."

Martin exhaled happily. "Any 'ifs' or 'buts'?"

"No, just a few words on the virtue of humility, ending up with the reminder that 'to serve is to reign.'"

He had spoken calmly, but Martin caught a strange undertone. It startled him, for it sounded like a tinge of bitterness, and Steve should have been happy, wildly happy at having succeeded in getting the call to the Subdiaconate. It was a triumph for him. Probably he had been so much on edge expecting to be clipped that the sudden reversal of his ex-

pectations had thrown him off balance. But it should not have left any bitterness in him.

Retreat began the following evening. Those receiving the Orders of Subdiaconate, Diaconate and the Priesthood were grouped separately for conferences on their particular Orders. These were the final steps of their preparation and the material could become more explicit now, more pointed and practical.

The evening of the first day Martin returned to his room. An envelope stared up at him from his desk. During retreat one was not supposed to receive letters. A single sentence was block-printed on the envelope: "Read this, Marty." He opened it and read:

I am leaving on the 4:45. When you read this I'll be on my way home. I could not say good-by to you, Marty, without making a fool of myself, and yet there are some things I must say to you, and so I'm putting them on paper. I'm quitting of my own accord. I did not lie to you about the call to Orders. I got it, but I didn't want it. It didn't mean anything to me anymore; it wasn't what I wanted. There hasn't been any satisfaction for me here the past year. Maybe I could stick it out till the end, but then there will be years of the same stuff as a curate under a pastor, and I've had enough of that. You're the only one left of the old gang, Marty. We started out pretty gay, didn't we? Maybe we didn't realize what it was all about, but as we went along we did. I guess that's why one after the other of us dropped out. They keep chipping away at you, knocking off one thing after another till there comes a time when you're down to nothing, and that's where I am now. I can't take it...

Martin sat stupidly with the paper in his hand. He re-read it. There were a lot of other things, about meeting each other in vacation, a sardonic allusion to "The Inseparables." Num-bly, Martin rose and made his way to Father Stoner's office.

His hand held out the letter. "This—this from Steve. Did he go home?"

"Yes. He took the 4:45." The priest's eyes studied the misery in Martin's face. Martin mumbled something and turned away. His hand was on the knob when Father Stoner's voice arrested him. "Where are you going?"

Martin looked over his shoulder. "Home," he said and left the room.

He dragged out his suitcase, and, as he tumbled articles of clothing into it, a line from Steve's letter kept running in his mind. "You're the only one left of the old gang. . . ." Steve wanted him to stay. But he was not going to stay. The whole thing had been a foot race and through some freak of fortune he had outlasted all of them. No, it wasn't a foot race, it was a bitter, hard servitude for life, shredding away every ounce of self until. . . .

"Kindly come to my office, Mr. Manning." Martin looked up. Father Stoner stood in the doorway. "I wish to talk to you."

"There is nothing to talk about. I'm going home."

Suddenly the tall form was at his side, the flashing eyes commanding his attention. "You will—after I have talked to you." Martin's face was still drawn with grief, and at the sight of it the priest's eyes softened. "You can't make a decision like this immediately after undergoing a shock. You are free to go, but it is my responsibility to see that you do not make a mistake. Come."

Martin followed him to his office.

"You and Mr. Kolesar were close friends."

"Yes."

"Perhaps too close."

"There was no wrong in it. He was my friend."

"No wrong in it? You want to leave now because your friend has left." He waited a moment. "Why did you come to the seminary—because your friend came?"

Martin mumbled something unintelligible.

"Why did you come here, answer me?"

Martin made no reply. It was true that he was leaving because Steve had gone, but it was not just because of that. He knew so well the bright shining vision which Steve had cherished, how he had labored and struggled to make himself worthy of it. They had taken it from him. They had made it impossible for him to ever see fulfillment; they had shut the door on the paradise of his dreaming. It was because of that he was leaving. There was a hurt inside of him, deep and wide as his whole being, and he wanted to flee the place where the wound had been inflicted, to shut out the sight of the instrument that had pierced him. In the bewilderment of his pain he thought it was the seminary, this massive edifice of silent strength and relentless rule, that had crushed Steve's soul and turned his own being into one aching anguish.

Father Stoner's unwavering eyes studied the face before him and his voice took on a strangely low, and almost pleading urgency. "Mr. Manning, I want you to finish this retreat. If you are going to leave, a week's time will not make any material difference. I ask it as a personal favor." Martin's eyes sought his wonderingly. "I need your help, so that no mistake be made."

"Why should I do this? My mind is made up."

"It is unfair to yourself and to the seminary to be leaving at such a moment and in a mood of recrimination."

"Unfair to the seminary! What do I owe the seminary? It ground down my friends until they *had* to leave. There were five of us. All of them were better than I, and it drove them out. It was pitiless to them. Love, friendship, idealism—what does that mean to the seminary? Nothing. It chokes all of it slowly out of your soul. Only one thing counts here—the rules. I'm sick and tired of rules. I'm human. I was born free and that's the way I want to live—"

The room filled with the stridency of the bell in the cor-

ridor. Father Stoner stood up, closed an open drawer in the desk, and picked up his breviary. "I'll see you here again after devotions."

Martin walked dully down the corridor. He felt vaguely ashamed of his outburst. Most of it had been things from Steve's letter. It had not been himself talking but Steve's spirit finding a voice in Martin's pain and loss. He stole into the choir loft and knelt down in a secluded nook in the transept.

The fumes of incense floated upwards from the altar; the organ rolled out sonorous chords that blended with the voices upraised in song. Martin was oblivious of it. His whole being was filled with such a sense of aloneness, such a feeling of desertion, that it was a dull physical pain congesting his throat and breathing. And this pain he knew would always be with him; even after he had left the seminary it would be with him, for he understood now that it was not the seminary that had brought it on but the death of what had been so dear.

Vaguely he looked about as though seeking an escape from the frightening isolation that was closing in upon him. The solemn edifice had never inspired him with such a feeling of otherworldness as now filled him; there was a sense of being completely cut off from all the tawdry, tainted commonness that was life. He was at the heart of things; and he was here by right, for the sorrow within him had lifted him clear up and away from values that were valueless. And looking downward into the hidden-away shadows of the transept he saw, and was aware of, a whiteness flowering there in the dark.

The flowing lines of the *Pietà* slumbered in the churchly gloom; a diffused blur, haunting the shadows with its tragedy of irreparable loss. In one sharp thrust all the exquisiteness of that Mother's anguish merged with his own suffering. And, strangely enough, even as sorrow enfolded him, there was a comforting sense of resting on its dark somber arms.

Over the troubled darkness of his soul there rose the light

of a great truth: the way of joy lies through sadness, real living is by death, many deaths. Clearly now, and for the first time, he fully grasped that one comes to the fullness of life by the emptying of oneself.

He was standing, and the strains of the ancient Latin hymn, the *Salve Regina*, floated into his consciousness. "*Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy...*" Like a clean, calm voice, came the melody of the Gregorian chant. "*Our life, our sweetness, and our hope...*" Something of the strength and sureness of those deep masculine voices seemed flowing in to him. "*To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears...*" The words of pleading rolled starkly from the arches of the church. They were his words, bleak, desolate, poignant. "*Turn then most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us...*" This was all that he asked, a glance from Her gracious, merciful eyes. This was all that was needed. In a surge of abandonment he cast himself into Her arms and, for one fleeting moment, sensation ceased. He was that wrenched, distorted Body upon her knees. And then down over him there stole from that brooding, compassionate Mother, a quickening warmth. Slowly, gently, like the reluctant loosening of a cold grasp, the desolation within him seemed to dissolve.

He found himself singing and his song was a prayer. "*O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.*"

He sank to his knees, and found words in his heart to tell of his bitterness and hopelessness and pain. By slow steps the revolt within him subsided into a great calm and a definite decision.

After some time, he rose and went to Father Stoner's office. "I'll finish the retreat," he said.

## Chapter 25

**Y**OU should not have let him go," said Father White. "I maintain," he reiterated, "you should not have let him go."

Father Stoner's eyes met his squarely, across the expanse of desk. "I made the decision. I'll stand by it."

"We could have found something for him to do here during the summer months—at least till he had come to a more balanced frame of mind. Back there, among his friends who have failed, he can come to only one decision."

"He wanted it that way."

"What did he say? His letter is a hodgepodge of confusion." Father White slapped the missive irritably against the open palm of his hand. "The only thing he made clear was that he has small intention of coming back."

Father Stoner placed both hands flatly on the desk and studied the backs of them. "At the end of the retreat he requested me to postpone his ordination to the Subdiaconate. I asked him if that meant he could not surmount the loss of his friend. To that he made no answer. I asked if it were something else, the matter of celibacy. He replied: 'No. It is hard for me to put it into words, Father, and humiliating; but it is only now that I have come to a full realization of all that the priesthood exacts.'" Father Stoner looked up. "What he was

saying, of course, was that through the loss of his closest friend and the impending vow of celibacy he had come to a full, if tardy, realization of the perfection expected of the priest."

"The whole burden of it then has come upon him in one heavy fall. You should not have let him go."

"I predicted that none of these five young men would stay, and, as I recall, you disagreed with me."

"I know," admitted Father White humbly. "It's—it's just that—it is always hard for me to see someone fail, I mean really fail."

"Would it surprise you to learn that I, too, have feelings in the matter?"

"They are pretty well disguised."

"They are not less real because of that." He went to the window and for a time seemed absorbed in the traffic streaming citywards. "I wonder what those hurrying people outside would think of all this relentless soul searching that we go through. They must think us abstruse dreamers, hopeless visionaries, perpetuators of Christ's folly." His shoulders lifted as though he had given a sigh of resignation. "It is a sick world, and the sickness of it is selfishness. There is only one cure—selflessness. To be another Christ means just that—to be selfless. Most candidates glimpse the implications of that only partially; they surrender small likes or dislikes, and think they have gained the goal. But gradually the discipline wears away one thing after another till it comes down to some fundamental passion rooted in the very core of one's being. When it strikes at that, we have many of them turning sadly away. They feel more is required than they can give. Unselfish they could be, not selfless." He faced about. "Ward left because he found out what selflessness meant—to have nothing. Kolesar finally grasped the full impact of the leadership he craved—to be the servant of the rest. The others?" He shrugged his



shoulders. "I imagine their defection was prompted by similar reasons."

"You're right," came Father White's reluctant admission. "Whelan came quickly to know that the love he craved permitted of no earthly loves. McBride—well, there is no helping the helpless if your own comfort comes first. But Manning—Manning was different."

"Yes, he was. The spark was there; but the choice must stay with him to quench it or let it become the beacon of his whole life."

Father White was silent for a while. Many thoughts were running through his mind, and when he finally spoke there was a faint trace of sadness in his voice. "It seems so futile, all the training we put them through, and from the few who survive there will still be some who fall short of the high performance that the priesthood demands."

"No matter how far they may stray, there is hope that they will find the way back if they have once fully understood and accepted the true greatness of their vocation." He seated himself again at his desk. "But this is beside the subject. We were discussing Manning."

"I wish you had induced him to remain," said Father White regretfully. "I fear it will be extremely difficult for him to come to an unbiased decision in his present surroundings."

"One goes by one's lights. The final step of the training is up to the student, not to the school."

"If only a second chance could be granted. It is so easy to err."

"If Manning has what is needed, he will come back; if not, it is better that he never return."

## Chapter 26

THE city slept. Only the clacketing elevated disturbed the deep of the warm night. Like a Stygian centipede, the Bronx Park local weaved its segmented body along the iron grooves of the trestle. Wearied and foredone, Steve and Martin sat alone in one of the cars. All night long they had been riding the mill race of the trains, from City Hall to Bronx Park, from Bronx Park to City Hall, and like the circuitous running of the trains their discussion seemed ever to return to the point of departure.

"You've got to go back, Martin, you've got to go back," insisted Steve. Like an endless refrain his urging had kept time to the soulless clacking of the wheels, as if by sheer force of repetition he could overwhelm Martin's indecision.

"You've been saying that all night, Steve," protested Martin weariedly.

"I was never so sure of anything in my life, Marty. That's why I keep telling you—you've got to go back."

"You gave it up, Steve, why try to make me hold on?"

"I made a mistake. I wasn't home a week before I knew it. Believe me, Marty."

"Then why don't you go back?"

"You know the answer to that. They don't hand you another chance on a platter."

"No, they don't. But they might give you another chance, Steve. You had a pretty good record. Why not try it?"

"I may later on. I've made my mistake, but you still have a chance. Marty, listen to me, will you?"

"All right, Steve, what is it?"

"All of us started out with right ideas, but there was something wrong mixed in with it. We all wanted something *for ourselves*. As soon as you've got what you wanted for yourself you find out it's nothing, you're empty-handed. As soon as I got home I fell into just the kind of job I wanted. I'm practically my own boss. I'd trade it right now for a chance to be in your shoes. Are you listening?"

"Yes, I'm listening, Steve."

"Don't make the mistake we did. Remember Father White that day our first retreat ended? We were all Marthas—wrapped up in a lot of things and thinking little about the one thing necessary. You can make it if you're unselfish. That's the whole secret. Understand, Marty?"

Martin looked up slowly. "I know that, Steve."

"You—you do?"

"Yes."

Steve was silent for a moment. "Well then, if you know what it's all about, what are you holding off for?"

"I just finished a retreat, Steve. It was the hardest job I ever did. I was alone, really alone, for the first time, and for the first time I saw the whole picture."

The conductor slammed the gates shut, looked suspiciously at the two young men huddled in a corner and then announced the next stop: "One Hundred and Twenty-fifth—Street!"

Martin waited until the train was again in motion and the noise of its mad rushing assured them of privacy. "The first words of the retreat were kind of grim, Steve. They were the opening words of the ceremony of ordination to the Subdiaconate: 'Beloved sons, you should thoughtfully consider

again and again the burden you freely seek to assume.' The Retreat Master told us what the burden meant: a vow of chastity, the surrender of human love that we might devote ourselves exclusively to the service of God."

"But you knew all about that, Marty. Why should that mean so much to you now?"

"I am not a disembodied spirit, Steve."

"Ye gods, don't tell me! You got over that crush for Alice months ago."

"I never had a crush on Alice," replied Martin. "You just haven't got the picture, Steve. I never realized how far unselfishness must reach until you quit. I'm like the rest of the fellows, I like good clothes, comfort, to be out in front, companionship—"

"You mean girls?"

Martin sighed resignedly. "All right, girls. When you left I realized that a priest has to give up what is dearest and deepest to him, that there can never be any limit to his unselfishness. Not if he is a real priest. And right on top of that I was asked to take a vow to seal me to that sort of thing for life."

"You aren't afraid?"

"What do you think?"

"You're just not used to the idea yet."

"I know that. What I'm asking myself is—will I ever be?"

"You've come this far—"

"That's no argument."

"Let me finish. You've come this far and there are only two more years of training left. You just can't quit now. Isn't this what you always wanted?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want it?"

Martin's gaze was fixed intently on his folded hands. "I've wanted it more than anything else in life."

"That's your answer. It's a big thing, and you've got to pay a big price, Marty."

The conductor clanged the gates open. "One Hundred and Forty-third—Street!"

The train charged on.

Martin was silent a long time. "Perhaps I haven't really been concerned about my fitness, perhaps I'm just unwilling to pay the price."

Steve turned a serious gaze upon his friend, and out of the wisdom of his own failure he spoke. "Marty, that was what finished me, and the rest of the fellows, too. We wanted the finest and best, but the price was too big." His voice softened as he looked at him, for he understood now the crosstides of desire and doubt warring in the heart of his friend, and having experienced weakness in himself he had an awareness and compassion for it in others. "Is it too big for you, too?"

Martin lifted confused eyes to Steve's solicitous countenance. "That, Steve, is what I'm still asking myself."

And that was the question which was to keep pounding through Martin's brain all the ensuing days. He shut himself away from all outside interests; for hours he sat on a bench in St. Mary's Park, reading carefully the notes of his recent retreat, and in the evening he slipped into the cool darkness of the church on Melrose Avenue and tried to pray his way into a decision. With ever-increasing clarity he understood the heart of the seminary's teaching and the very core of its greatness, the greatness of Christ; and that greatness lay not in what a man possessed, or achieved, but in what he was. It all came back to that first retreat and the fundamental statement presented to him then. That, he realized now, had been the keynote of all these years of study and prayer. The greatness of a man lay in this, that he was little; his highest liberty, in being subject; for man is never so great as when he is completely independent of created things, and he is never so free

as when he is utterly subject to the Uncreated. And that had been the purpose behind all this stripping away of other aspirations and desires.

It was all clear as morning light to his mind, but it made not the least impression upon him. The white flawlessness of his vision was as an arctic light, pitiless in its clarity but with no power to warm him to enthusiasm. It failed to touch his will.

## Chapter 27

IT HAD all happened as though planned: his meeting with Joe, and Joe's open concern about his pale and drawn appearance; the seemingly casual invitation to join him and Alice in their vacation on a quiet New Jersey farm, and Martin's refusal due to lack of funds; and then Joe's unexpected action of arranging for him to work on the farm. It had solved the financial difficulty for Martin, and made further refusal on his part impossible.

There followed days beneath the sun and the bright blue skies, absorbing hours of toil in fields of thrusting life, the growing grain covering the gentle slopes of the hill, fold on fold of verdant velvet. The tiny lake cupped in a hollow on the summit of the hill was a little sanctuary for him, a natural retreat where he loved to linger with his hazed thoughts and half-formed prayers. Water and trees, humming insects, flowers and sky became to him sacraments, visible signs of an inward power, filling him with strange yearnings and with stirring, stretching desires for which he could find no words. A shadowy succession of emotions flowed over him, abasement and exultation; a tingling awareness of life, its joy and its beauty; a humble gratefulness that all this should be his.

Perhaps the keenness of his delight was merely the counter-swing of the pendulum after the tiring months of thought and

self-searching, but it was compellingly sweet and strong and good. He felt again the pull of his old ideals, an eagerness, a restlessness to be about the business of life. Sorrow had no place on earth. Joy was the lot of man. While the sky had its sun and the earth its flowers there could be no loneliness for man, for louder than all discords did they sing their quiet song of joy and fulfillment. Gone from him was all indecision, and contentment brimmed the cup of his heart. Only one thing was lacking—to share it.

He found her seated in the very heart of his retreat. Her knees were pulled up cupping her chin, her face a blank of unhappiness as she looked, with unseeing eyes, at the water. He turned away, but she heard the dried branch that snapped beneath his tread. "Marty."

He turned back. "Hello, Alice."

"Where are you going?"

"No place. Where's Joe?"

"At the house." He stood silent, awkwardly self-conscious.

"Oh, come on and sit down. I won't bite you."

He smiled. "I thought you might want to be alone."

"What for?"

"I don't know. That's what I come here for. It's good for you."

"To be alone? What's good about it?"

"You have to try it to know."

She looked at him resentfully. "You're getting to be a terrible stuffed shirt. You never talk, and when you do it's like listening to a sermon."

Martin reddened. "I'm sorry. I didn't know I sounded like that." He thought vaguely of Mr. Wurmser, wondering whether he had become like him.

"Well, are you going to sit down?"

Martin sat down at a respectful distance from her and quietly observed her appearance. She had matured in the past year, but her dark-haired loveliness was spoiled by the petu-



lant droop of her lip and by the rebelliousness which clouded her features. He ventured a question: "Don't you like it up here?"

"No."

"Why not?"

She looked at him with ill-concealed impatience. "I'm only a bird in a gilded cage."

"I don't understand."

"You wouldn't. You're out of this world."

He moved uneasily. "Joe didn't tell me anything except that both of you were going to spend your vacation here. How am I to know?"

"Vacation!" There was fine contempt in the word. "This is dad's idea. To get me away from pernicious influence." She mouthed the last two words.

"What is his name?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Dick."

"Has he become pernicious?"

"That's what dad thinks. Do you know what he keeps calling him all the time?—'That no-good ex-seminarian!' Isn't that a laugh? He shouted himself apoplectic when Joe went away to the seminary and he wore him down until he left; and now he has only contempt for Dick because Dick didn't make a go of it. That's men for you."

Martin smiled. "Cheer up. It's only a matter of a few weeks, isn't it?"

"A lot can happen in a few weeks," she replied darkly. "There's another girl—"

"Oh-oh, a light begins to dawn," he broke in smilingly.

She looked at him angrily. "What are you grinning at? Do you think it's funny to be cooped up here with a brother for a jailer, while another girl takes away your fellow?" There was a suspicion of tears in her voice.

"I'm sorry, Alice, I didn't mean—"

"It's all right for you to grin. You're wrapped up in grave clothes already. You're dead. It doesn't mean anything to you, but it hurts, I tell you it hurts." She began to cry softly.

Martin looked at her helplessly. He picked up a dried branch and broke it nervously between his fingers. She kept on crying. He threw away the twigs and edged closer. His hand came out and touched her shoulder. "I'm sorry, Alice, really I am."

She pushed his hand away angrily.

He spoke again. "It isn't true, Alice, what you said." His voice was condescendingly gentle. "Because a fellow goes to a seminary doesn't mean that he's—he's—inhuman or hard-hearted. I just didn't know this meant so much to you. I'll do anything I can to help, honestly I will." She made no reply. "Isn't there something I can do?"

"Give me a handkerchief."

He fumbled in his pockets. The required article was not in his possession. He remembered the one tied about his neck. "I've only got this one, Alice, and—it's kind of dirty."

Her hand reached out, and he put the handkerchief in it. After a while she turned to him, her head bent low with the shame of her childish tears. With protracted and unnecessary care she worked the handkerchief back into his shirt pocket, and, the task completed, artlessly leaned her head against him. She began to talk, rather incoherently, about the good times she and Dick had managed to have together, and all the trouble it had occasioned between her and her father.

Martin was acutely aware of the head pillowed against him. There was a faint scent emanating from the tangled luxuriousness of her hair. As abruptly as she had begun Alice ceased her tale of woe, and turned her eyes up to him. "I don't know why I'm telling you all this, Marty, except that it would all have been different, I guess, if you hadn't gone away."

"A good talking out always does you good," he said, put-

ting one hand at the side of her face preparatory to disengaging himself.

Both Alice's hands swiftly came up and took possession of his, holding it captive there. "I feel all right when I'm with you. I've always felt that way, even before you went to the seminary."

"Dick wouldn't like to hear you say that. I thought you cared for him."

"He's different. He's fun, but it's—it's a different kind of fun. There's no rest in it."

"We'd better get going. It's lunch time." He stood up quickly and helped her to her feet. She tried to maintain hold of his hand but he withdrew it.

"What's the matter, Marty?"

"Nothing."

"It's no sin to hold my hand."

"I didn't say it was."

"You acted like it."

They began walking towards the farmhouse. "I don't want to offend you, Alice, but you must understand that I can't be strolling around the countryside with a girl on my arm. I'm going to be a priest."

"Can't you ever forget that?"

"If I do, others don't. What would Joe say if he saw anything like that?"

Her lips pouted. "Oh, bother Joe!"

"It would bother him all right—and me, too."

Her face cleared. "Does it bother you to hold my hand?"

"That wasn't what I meant." A mischievous inquisitiveness twinkled in her eyes, and Martin abruptly forestalled her reply. "There's a smudge on the corner of your face."

"Where?"

He put his finger on it. She pulled the handkerchief from his shirt pocket, and moistened it with the tip of her tongue.

"It would be terrible if we got back and they noticed traces

of tears," she said, looking at him teasingly. "What would they imagine you had been doing to me?"

"Beating you," he laughed. "If you don't stop playing games I may have to do that yet."

"You would have to catch me first," she retorted and took to her heels, casting a provocative glance over her shoulder.

Sedately, Martin kept on walking. Alice stopped and waited for him to come up. "I guess you're just a corpse," she said crossly. "Come on, rigor mortis."

He smiled and continued walking at her side.

On Sundays they went to church together. Alice critically studied the plump face of the pastor as he stood in the pulpit. For fifteen minutes she listened to a fervent sermon on the parish debt, and for five minutes to a discourse on the text "Be on your guard against false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but are ravenous wolves within." She tried to envision Martin in his place, but the picture failed to form. Martin had never been intended for that sort of career. It was all wrong.

They walked quietly home, Martin and Joe and Alice. It always irritated her that he was so careful to stay at Joe's side and not come near her. The stupid seminary ways of him! It awoke in her a desire to shock him out of his calm, his assured attitude on life, his sheep-like way of doing whatever the seminary had taught him. "What's that little black joke book you read during Mass, Marty?" she asked.

"Joke book?—Oh." Martin drew it out of his pocket. "This?"

"Yes."

"It's my prayer book."

"It doesn't look like one."

"It's my own. I made it."

"You mean you wrote it? Let me see it."

Martin made no move to comply, and Joe broke into the

conversation. "Sometimes I think you haven't got a brain in your head, Alice."

"Why, what have I done now?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing! Just leave Marty alone will you and mind your own business for a change."

Alice's lower lip protruded in a prodigious pout. "I didn't go to a seminary, and if it's some mysterious book of rules how was I supposed to know?"

"It isn't anything like that, Alice," put in Martin pacifically. "It's just some thoughts and quotations I put down from my reading and some prayers that I liked. It's a kind of personal thing."

"Well then, I don't want to see it," she said. She turned her head, and studiously observed the people passing by, painstakingly keeping a slight distance away from Joe to denote her utter disinterest in them and their conversation.

But her curiosity about the book had been aroused, and, repeatedly, she sought out Martin, on Sunday afternoons, in his quiet nook by the lake. They talked about many matters. She questioned him and he answered. She took and he shared. Always, in some way or other, she managed to come back to that small black book, but Martin never permitted her to have it.

Through the bright days of early summer they saw much of each other. Alice seemed to find no happiness unless it was near him, and he devoted himself to her with an attention that became, by insidious steps, exclusive.

To Martin she had become part of the pattern of this interlude of peace and contentment. He felt filled with the brightness and bounty of the summertide, with the sureness and the greatness of the things that he felt it was his destiny to achieve, and she was the cup into which he could pour the overflow of his feelings and aspirations. It mattered not that a spirit of dark unrest and complaint inhabited her. That made it only the more imperative that he should see her and give to her the

happiness that was his. He could help her. He was aware of his power to lighten her mood, to make her laugh, to smooth out the rebelliousness that made of her such an incomplete person.

It was late June, and flower and tree, water and sky slept in an hypnotic peace. Martin, outstretched beneath a tree, savored deeply the tranquility all about him. The lake slept in torpid heat. A dragonfly buzzed its wings and flicked at the glassy surface of the water. There was a liquid plop as an alert bass leaped for its prey. The teeming, moist smell of the earth and the grasses; the algae-laden sedges fringing the lake; a lazy cloud mirroring its whiteness in the water; a hermit thrush's song spilling sweet and clear from the dark of the willow trees—Martin's mind roved out beyond the peace and timelessness of it all to the eons ago through which this little body of water had lived: the cycles of years that had floated over its cameo-like beauty; the mighty forces that had gouged the bedding for it out of the summit of this hill; the periods of the prehistoric monsters when outlandish pterodactyls blundered about in the air above it, when mountainous dinosaurs lumbered down to its ledge to slake their thirst, when tree ferns crowded its shores, when monstrous lizards lay basking in the sun that flooded its primeval peacefulness, when man and his torturous seeking, his erratic sequence of construction and destruction were not here to distort its loveliness; when the world was fresh and sweet, untouched and good; when whatever there was of strife was clean-cut and soon ended, and not, as it was now, a slippery stumbling down streets of darkness, inevitable darkness.

A swell of exaltation lifted and carried him, like the cresting curve of a wave. He was the culmination of time, for him the centuries had woven their intricate design, for him had this lake been in evolution through the hundreds of harmonious years. By the weaving shuttles of time the crudities and incompleteness of rock and stone, of earth and water, of tree

and sky had been skilfully blended and woven into a new pattern of peace and beauty. And he thought that in all the wide sweep of nature there were places like this for everyone, a place of retreat and quiet, where the serious part of man awakes and lives, where there is no need for scurrying after money, for feverish chicanery to outdo one's fellow man, where there is only the peace of an abiding Presence. A divine assurance possessed him. Life was not merely to toil by day and to sleep by night, to be born, beget, and be buried. There was something indestructible in him, something that drank avidly of this beauty outspread before him, something that had in itself, as part of itself, a consuming thirst for beauty, an unquenchable thirst for a beauty that would never sate and never end.

"Room for me?" asked a voice.

Martin rolled over on his back and sat up quickly. "Hello, Alice."

She came to his side. "It's sure dead, isn't it?"

"Anything but. Look." He pointed to a dragonfly. "He's having a high old time in the sun." A kingfisher gave its braying cry from a willow tree. "See that? Watch now." A bolt of blue feathers smashed the surface of the water. In the bird's captive beak gleamed a frantically struggling fish.

"It's not very exciting," said Alice in a low voice.

"But it's real and it's life. Can't you feel it, breathe it?"

"No," she said, her voice still low.

He looked at her a moment. "Follow me, Alice," he ordered. He edged forward on hands and knees to the rim of the lake where a clump of white oleanders were in exuberant blossom. "Lean over and look in the water."

Alice leaned forward and saw the dark sullenness of her face mirrored in the water.

"It would make a beautiful picture," he said softly, over her shoulder, "if you'd smile."

Intently she gazed at the smooth whiteness of her face, the

cloud of dark hair framing the discontent of her countenance. As if by magic white blossoms appeared about her face forming an enchanting frame. Slowly she turned her head backwards, and saw that Martin had bent down overhanging boughs of oleander blossom to wreath her with their white fairness. She turned back and studied her reflected image. A glow came into her eyes, her lips quirked, and the quiet water mirrored her smile. "Satisfied?"

He bobbed his head in assent. "That's the way it should be—always."

Abruptly she jumped to her feet and caught Martin's hand, drawing him back to the shade of the tree. He sat down beside her. "You're good to look at when you're happy," he said, "you're beautiful then."

She turned to him, her smile warmly grateful. She drew closer to him.

All about them was contentment and fulfillment; the trees deep in foliage, the flower cups holding the maturing seeds, the slumbrous water teeming with microscopic life, the sunlight, warm and soft.

Alice looked at Martin's pensive face, the shining intensity in his young eyes, the silence that he had drawn about him like a mysterious impalpable covering. Somewhere deep within him was hidden a mysterious well of deep peace and contentment. She wanted to find it, to know it, to have it. It was what had drawn her to him, what she loved in him, and she wanted to take it from him. "What are you thinking of, Marty?"

He looked at her slowly, his eyes still wonder-filled, dream-hazed. "This, all this, Alice, and what it really means."

"The sun, the flowers?"

"Yes. The happiness in them, the happiness they bring us!"

"It's summer, that's all."

"It's more."

"No. It's just summer." She had drawn very close to him and her chin rested lightly on his shoulder. He turned his head



slowly. Her eyes were alight; the breath from her parted lips, soft as the air about them, caressed his cheek. She crushed her mouth hard against his.

He looked down at her face resting on his shoulder. Gone from her was all unrest and brooding dissatisfaction. She seemed utterly content and one with the fulfillment about her.

He stood up, and she took his hand, and they went down the hill.

## Chapter 28

THE sun beat mercilessly on the pavement. Heat shimmered up in waves that were cast back from the brick fronts of the apartment buildings. Pedestrians hastened by, casting brief glances of interest at the torn-up section of pavement and the overalled, mustachioed man who was spraying water on the ground. The moist soil gaped in the gray surface of the street.

From the depths of the moatlike cellar that fronted the building came the rhythmic scrape of shovels. Laborers were mixing the cement in this subterranean retreat, and the sunlight, striking through the iron grating overhead, laid a pattern of shadowy bars over their bent bodies. Martin's shovel bit into the heap of sand and cement, scooped it a short distance, and flicked it over. On the other side of the heap an olive-skinned Italian swung his shovel in rhythmic accord with Martin's.

They stopped and Martin ran a finger across his brow, cutting the drops of sweat away. "It's hot, Pete."

"Yeah."

They rested a moment and then resumed their work. A hollow was fashioned in the top of the heap of mixed sand and cement, and water was poured into it. They settled into the rhythm of their shoveling again.

"Got that stuff ready?" called down a rough voice.

Pete looked up at the drooping mustaches of the cement mason. "She's all ready now."

"Get it up here, then."

They took pails and shoveled the gray sludge into them. Up the steps they went slowly, into the glaring brightness of the street, and dumped the wet cement for the waiting masons. The trowels glided across it in smooth, sweeping crescents.

Martin's fingers were clawed into painful constriction from the iron handles of the pails. He had shifted them from palm to first joint, and then to the second, and then back to the palm again. Midday was a welcome relief. He and Pete sat on the ground in the cellar, munching sandwiches and drinking thirstily from quart bottles of milk.

Martin fumbled awkwardly with his sandwich.

"The hands are hurting, eh?" observed Pete.

"They're stiff."

Pete studied him a while. "What do you want to work this kind of job for, eh?"

Martin looked at him. "The same reason you do, I guess."

"You need the money, eh?" Martin nodded assent. "It's not much money. You get more for your work if you work in a store."

"It's good money, Pete."

"Nah. It's no good, no good. Always the same—shovel, shovel, shovel. You be smart. Get another job."

"Why don't you, Pete?"

"I got a wife and kids. Got to eat, got to pay rent. You married?"

"No."

"Then what you want to work like this for? You poor?"

"Yes, I'm poor."

Pete returned to his attack on a loaf of bread split in half and interlarded with a mess of peppers and other violent look-

ing vegetables. Abstractedly, Martin watched him. Poor—he wasn't really poor. He was only trying to be. His gaze left Pete, and traveled down his own sweat-sodden shirt and dusty brown pants, and finally came to rest on his cement-encrusted shoes. He was unpleasantly aware of the fetid mustiness of the cellar, the sour smell of dried sweat, the hard feel of the brick wall at his back. Faintly there came to him from up above, as from some bright land beyond his reach, the noises of the city's busy street. He looked at his dirtied hands and thought of how Father Carroll's face would contort in horror at the sight of them. And yet he felt strangely proud of them, their broken nails, the calluses, the red wheals across the joints of the fingers from the morning's labor. They were the hands of a laborer, of a poor man, and that was what he wanted to be, poor, literally poor.

Pete, covertly studying Martin's somber face, suddenly spoke. "What's the matter with you, eh?"

"Matter? Nothing's the matter."

"What's the matter you never laugh—always think, think, think." Pete gazed at him shrewdly. "You got a girl?"

Martin hesitated. "Yes. That is, I—"

"You have a fight with her, eh?"

"No."

"Then what's the matter with you? Take her out to a show, laugh, make a little love, eh? Get happy."

It was a simple formula, but it dealt with a problem that was not his. Melancholy had come upon him with terrifying suddenness, and he could not shake it. In Alice's presence he had dissembled, not wishing to cast a shadow on her new joy by a show of the growing darkness within him. But the time came when his mood of dejection could no longer be hid, and so he had fled back to the city. Alice and Joe had been absent on a motor excursion and he had left a note, disguising the real reason for his departure with the news of his father's illness and the need of his presence at home.

Again and again he had reviewed the events of the past days, trying to probe his way into an understanding of the dismal disgust that overrode him. But he could find no answer.

In the nearness to Alice there had been born in him the first stirrings of selfish desire. He was away from her now, but images of her absorbed all his hours of work and of thought. Thrusting upwards, through the smothering clasp of this infatuation, there was a voice, crying out as if in pain, for submission to this infatuation meant its own death. It could not live, for its life was selflessness; and he was yielding to an absorbing and strangling, although human and understandable, selfishness.

His dreams of the future had become dead ashes. It was not merely that his ideals had lost their savor as in the early weeks of the vacation; this was different, worse, for now he felt that the things he had striven for were false, that a juvenile day-dream had deluded him into years of worthless study and discipline. And yet in those years, he stubbornly told himself, there had been happiness, and that must have been bound up with his ideals. So he desperately strove to regain them, grimly promising himself that in their literal pursuit he would recapture happiness. He would be poor, starkly poor, a servant of the lowliest workmen.

In the hours of absorbing toil he did find surcease from thought, and partial peace, but the end of labor always threw him back upon himself, and there he found only emptiness and a sense of loss.

"Time's up," yelled the voice of the foreman. "Get going down there."

They stood up, crumpled the papers that had wrapped their sandwiches and stuffed them in the necks of the empty milk bottles, which they placed in a corner. The rhythm of shoveling began again.

At 6:00 o'clock the job was finished. Empty barrels were placed at the corners of the newly-laid pavement and planks

stretched across. Martin remained as watchman. He sat on the curbstone, his eyes alert for the youngsters whose craving for immortality took the form of inscribing their initials in the still moist cement.

At 6:30 a ramshackle truck drew up, and its furtive-eyed, blotchy-skinned driver came up to Martin. "Help me load the stuff, feller," he said.

Martin stood up. "Where's the next job?"

"On Third Avenue, near 151st Street." The furtive eyes studied him a moment. "Lonesome?"

"No."

He looked over his shoulder. "I know a hot spot—"

"Let's load the stuff."

"It's not going to cost you a—"

"I said let's load the stuff."

They went into the basement and brought up the shovels and pails, and the tool bags of the cement masons. The truck driver kept up a running, detailed account of his backstairs adventures. Finally, Martin stopped him. "Look, what's your name?"

"Tucker. Slim Tucker. That's what everyone calls me, Slim."

"Look, Slim. What has all this got you?"

"What do you suppose? A good time, of course."

"You're just kidding yourself. What gives when the whole thing ends?"

Slim gave him a long look. "What are you? A phony or a preacher?"

"Neither. I just hate to see you knocking your brains out this way. I don't get it."

Slim gave a sudden sly chuckle. "You try it once and you'll see why."

Martin shrugged and they went on into the street. After vainly urging several addresses on Martin, Slim drove away,

lustily chanting an unexpurgated roundelay concerning a damosel who hailed from Armentiers.

The incident had a depressing effect upon Martin. By most people Slim would be rated a total loss; and yet, in the animal way of life to which the man had reduced his existence, he had reached a kind of contentment.

Weariedly, Martin sat on the curb, a tide of loneliness and futility flooding over him. Life was escaping him, and he had achieved nothing, found nothing, except this sudden dropping away of all his dreams, this abrupt quenching of the light within him. A brief moment of joy upon a sunlit hill, and then days and weeks of darkness. How heavily one paid for life's brief moments of joy.

The street darkened, and a quiet star rose over the tenement tops, like a messenger of hope. Martin watched it as serene, untouched, it floated above the city. Far better to be like you, he thought, peaceful, purposeful, devoid of will and feeling, for then we could not sorrow, we could not err.

He stood up, lit the red lamps and placed them about the pavement as a warning to pedestrians. He pulled down his cap and trudged homewards through the dark.

## Chapter 29

**Y**OUR letters were a joy, Marty, but it's not like being together." Alice clung to his arm, her eyes sparkling. "I've been thinking all week of this day."

" 'Distance lends enchantment to the view,' " smiled Martin.

Alice stepped in front of him and gazed at him critically. "It's enchanting even at close range," she appraised.

Marty colored. "That's flattery. Why didn't you let me know you were coming? I'd have got a haircut."

"A surprise is good for the soul."

They entered St. Mary's Park and strolled along the asphalt walks. For days Alice had lived on the memories of his words and the unforgettable hours on the hill; she had read and re-read the letters he had sent; but the craving to be near him, to see and touch him, had become a consuming hunger. Regardless of consequences, she had to be with him again, for there was a vague fear of the future in her, a clamorous need to make certain that his affection for her was as urgent and as growing as hers was for him.

They found a deserted bench. The Sunday crowds were fast filtering homewards.

"This isn't as nice as our little lake on the hill, is it, Marty?"

"No. There are people here."

"And so—no freedom."



"It's not because of the people. It's the city. It fills you up, chokes you."

A befuddled figure sprawled out on some newspapers on a near-by lawn, suddenly sat up, scrubbed dirty fingers through his matted hair and stared stupidly about him. He got to his feet, pulled his bedraggled coat about him, and shambled away.

She took one of Martin's hands, softly touching the calluses and inspecting the work-hardened palm. "Must you do that kind of work?"

"Dad's sick, you know, Alice. We need the money."

"You can do better." He turned away, but she put her hand under his chin and turned his face back to her. "What's wrong, Marty? Didn't you have fun this afternoon?"

"I enjoyed every minute with you."

"You're sad because you can't go back with me?"

"I'd like to."

"Why don't you?"

"You know I can't."

"You could visit me over the week end, couldn't you?" He made no reply. "Don't you want to?"

"Want what?"

"To come out and see me next Saturday?"

"Oh, yes, I'd like to."

She studied him a moment. "Marty, something *is* wrong? You've changed all of a sudden. You're different."

He looked down at the ground. "I know, Alice."

"What is it?"

"I—I don't know."

"You're working too hard."

"No. That isn't it."

"It—it isn't I?"

"No. I'm glad you came. Just seeing how happy you are makes me feel a lot better." He clasped his hands together and seemed absorbed in the study of them. Father White had told

him that one had to find happiness before one could give it to others. He had found it, and as soon as he had imparted it, he had lost it.

"I haven't been happy the last few days either, Marty."

He looked at her. "Lonesome?"

"Terribly. I—I just had to see you. That's why I came."

"I'm glad you did."

"Don't be gloomy then, Marty, or I'll be the same." He made no reply, and she began nervously to click the catch on her purse open and shut. "You're still thinking about the seminary," she accused.

"Yes."

Her eyes studied the shiny little fastener on her purse. "Do you still want to go back?" She waited for his reply, but none was forthcoming. "Marty, tell me, why did you ever go there?"

"For the same reason as the other fellows, Alice. We saw something big in it, something good, something true."

"Do you still believe that?"

"Yes, but it's gone cold. It's only words. I don't know why. I just feel dead towards it."

"You're seeing things more clearly, that's all, Marty."

"Am I? Maybe it's the other way round."

She entwined her fingers with his, squeezing them tightly. "Marty, I've thought so much over the things you talked about on the hill." Her fingers slackened in his. "I can't understand, Marty. They seem so—so visionary and unreal. How can you help the poor without money; how are you going to lead others if you haven't power or money? And if you are going to bring love into the lives of others, you have to be complete yourself—fulfilled in love."

"It was done before."

She looked at him sharply. "Yes, and they killed Him."

"But not what He started."

"Oh, Marty, Marty. Don't be so hopeless about this. There is so much misery in life. I've seen it in my father's waiting room. I've heard him talk about the drunkards, the vicious, the bestial he has had to treat. They'll beat you down with their vileness and leave you empty of everything that is you. A priest is no different from other men. He can only touch the surface of a wound as wide as creation."

"How will it be healed if no one tries?"

The blunt challenge of his words halted her, momentarily. "Each must try for happiness in his or her own small circle," she offered. "Does that sound selfish? It isn't. It's just realistic, Marty. You can't throw your arms around the whole world."

"I know that, Alice, I know that."

"Then why keep on holding to it? Why insist on going back to the seminary? Why close your eyes to reality and try to escape life?"

"I didn't go to the seminary to escape life, Alice, but because it offered something that I wanted. I told Steve that I wanted it more than anything else on earth."

"More than me?"

"More than you; more than my father and mother; more than anything else on earth."

"You didn't know what you were saying."

"I didn't; but I know now."

"And?"

"It's more than I can carry."

"Of course it is. It isn't human. It's—it's fantastic. It's cruel."

"But true, Alice, true."

"Is it?"

"It brought you happiness."

She looked at him. "No, Marty, you." He stared at her. "Did I shock you? I can't help it. I have to be frank and truthful with you, Marty, and I really believe it is only the now that counts. You are putting off happiness to some future heaven

that you may never reach." He gave her a strange look. "Don't look at me in such a superior fashion, Marty. That's how Joe looks before he says something disagreeable."

"I'm sorry, Alice. You surprised me."

"I was afraid I would."

"It's wrong, you know."

"Is it?"

"Yes."

"Why? Tell me why."

Martin said nothing. He knew the answer; he had known it once, a long time ago it seemed, and his years of study had rounded it out. Striving for an immediate, tangible happiness reduced one to the proportions of what one could hold in one's hand. And to obtain certain things one had to take them from others, by chicanery, by push, by ruthlessness. Wealth and prominence all came the same way, and after getting them one found oneself merely shackled to a life of unending effort to keep what had been got. A man died when he stopped giving and began grabbing.

He knew all this, but could tell her not one word of it. For it had now become to him a mere jumble of phrases. He himself wanted happiness, a tangible happiness, and the embodiment of that happiness was at that moment at his very side. He wanted to have, and in that desire had lost the urge to give.

"Haven't you any answer?"

"Yes, but it wouldn't mean anything to you, Alice. It doesn't make sense to me anymore."

"That's because it isn't true any longer."

"I don't know. I was pretty happy with it for a long time, but now I'm not."

"You're just getting new perspectives, newer dimensions, Marty. Breaking away hurts—I know. I've been through it. But the new and lovely world you come into is worth it." He was gazing at her intently, searchingly. "Don't you believe me, Marty?"

"You look happy now, Alice, while you're speaking that way."

"I have found happiness, Marty, and it's because I've decided to take my happiness when it comes—and it has come—if you want it. Don't be narrow like my father, Marty. There is not one truth but many truths. We could be so happy in searching and finding them together."

He looked away. Dusk was settling over the trees and lawns. A drab figure of a girl, holding a cardboard box under one arm, came down the path. She glanced at them with that hesitant timidity that is the mark of the oft repulsed.

Dimly aware of the petitioning in the lusterless eyes, Martin gave her an encouraging smile. She sidled up to him, and her voice was a subdued whisper. "Do you want to buy a flower, mister?"

He reached into his pocket and drew out a half dollar. "Two," he said.

They were cheap fluffs of paper, crudely put together, a travesty of nature's handiwork.

"It's—it's twenty cents," mumbled the girl.

Martin looked up. The half dollar was lying in the palm of her hand, and the embarrassment flooding her face told him that she did not have any change. It was the first sale she had made that day. "Oh, that's—that's all right," he blundered out quickly. "They're worth a great deal more than that. They're beautiful." He turned to Alice. "Aren't they, Alice?"

"Yes, they're pretty."

Martin peered at Alice. Her tone was disinterested, she seemed far away, totally unaware of anything except her own thoughts. He wondered if she had even seen the girl. "I got them for my mother. She has an altar in her bedroom," he confided. It disturbed him that Alice could have been so blind to the girl and her need. He thrust the flowers towards Alice. "Do you think she'll like them?"

Alice met Martin's urgent glance with an indulgent smile.

This impulsive interest in others was the very thing she had been trying to show him was futile; it was wasted generosity, and yet she loved him for it. She fingered the flowers. "They're nice. Your mother will like them, I am sure." She stood up. "It's getting late. We'll have to get a taxi if I'm to catch my train."

"A taxi? The subway's the quickest."

"I want to be alone with you all I can."

In the long ride downtown they spoke but little. They were shut away in a well of shadow, and they knew again something of the warmth of understanding and joy that had first come to them on the summit of a sunlit hill. The world of honking noise and drabness outside was an alien world, sordid, uninteresting, and did not touch the brightness of their mood. "If we could only ride on this way forever and ever," breathed Alice.

"What a limited horizon," smiled Martin.

"Unending happiness, is that limited?" she replied.

"No." He looked at her intently. "Are you going to find it here?"

"Yes, but not alone."

On the upper deck of the Barclay Street ferry they found a deserted spot, and, hand in hand, they stared at the needles of stone piercing the Manhattan skyline as the setting sun struck the topmost windows into flame. The water lapped musically past the ferry's thrusting sides; a tug's whistle sounded its hoarse warning in the distance; the light of a solitary star awoke in the heavens; and the air was sweet and fresh on their faces.

She leaned close to him. "I want what is best and biggest for you, Marty. You've brought me happiness, and I want to give it back to you—full, complete, unchanging happiness. Don't you understand? Don't you, Marty?"

"Yes, Alice," he said humbly. "I understand and I love you

for it." He took her hand and looked at it. "You make me feel small and selfish."

"Selfish? Oh, no, Marty. It was you who taught me the joys of unselfishness."

"Did I?"

"You could never be selfish. I know it."

The ferry thudded against the dock, and Martin rose and tucked Alice's arm securely into his.

They were at the depot in ample time. Seated on a bench before the station clock, they watched the throngs of commuters and week-end travelers hastening to meet their trains; no word of comment on the bustling scene passing their lips. Alice's hand nestled possessively in his. He turned to study her and the contentment so evident in her face. She smiled at him. "Everything would be heavenly if you were coming with me, Marty."

"Maybe I'll be able to, next week end."

"Promise?"

"Promise." It was a hesitant, wavering assent.

"Couldn't you say it just a little bit more as though you meant it, Marty?" Her head was tilted slightly, her voice gently wistful.

"There's nothing I'd like more than to come, Alice, you know that, but—I'm afraid I'd not be good company."

Her finger tips traced a pensive design over the back of his hand. "You must not think that way, Marty. I don't always expect to take. I want to share, too."

He said nothing, the warm pressure of his fingers alone telling her of his gratitude for her understanding. They were drawn closely together, a little world of complete self-absorption in the midst of the bustling turmoil. All about them were the nervous noises of the depot—the scrape and clack of purposeful feet, the wail of a fretful child, voices of exclamation, of greeting, of farewell.

Past them came a patter of footsteps, urgent, fearful, differ-

ent from the rest. As the figure brushed past they both looked up, for they had heard the moaning that came forth from her lips.

She was a shabby old woman, frenziedly oblivious of everything except one small compact knot of men. Headlong, she plunged into them. "Jimmy, my Jimmy!" She threw her arms about a hard-faced youth, showering him with caresses. His shoulders twitched, but his manacled hands could not embrace her. He cursed impotently. She turned a tear-streaked face to the guards. "Don't take him away, don't, please."

"Come on, madam, come on," ordered one of the detectives bluffly.

"He didn't do anything wrong. Please, please, mister." Her moaning was like the cries of an animal in pain. The youth's head jerked away from her, and a stream of profanity flowed from his lips. One of the detectives took firm hold of the woman and led her aside. She stood there alone, apart, a little island of shame and anguish in the midst of the hurrying throngs.

Martin and Alice gazed past the distraught mother, watching the officers march their prisoner through the turnstile.

A train dispatcher's raucous voice called through the depot: "Orange, Berkeley Heights, Summit..." Martin looked at Alice. Their final moment of intimacy had been taken from them. Alice turned her gaze away and looked up at the station clock and then down at her wrist watch. "It's almost time, Marty."

He looked at his watch. "Just a few minutes."

Reluctantly, they stood up and, with laggard feet, went towards the turnstile. They walked past the old woman; her snuffling was disturbingly audible, but Martin did not see her, did not hear her. For the first time in his life he was utterly oblivious of anything except himself. The sweetness, the brightness that had been with him throughout the hours of this day was now to leave him; Alice would go back, and



throughout the week there would be nothing to look forward to but memories.

They walked down the ramp beside the train and found a secluded spot behind a truck loaded with trunks. Alice gazed up into the darkening features beside her, understanding so well his unhappiness at their separation, for her own mood matched his. She drew up closely to him. "Marty, I told you today," she whispered, "that one's arms have a limited reach; but within them there is room for all the love, all the selflessness one is capable of." Her arms stole up and around his neck. "I'll be waiting and thinking of you, only you, dear, till I see you again."

She was going away, and ahead of him stretched the bleak prospect of wearying work and empty loneliness. His arms tightened about her. "I'll come, Alice, I'll come," he promised.

## *Chapter 30*

THE train had departed, and Martin made his way back towards the waiting room of the station. He walked lightly, wrapped still in the tenderness of Alice's farewell. But as he threaded his way through the noise and confusion, each step seemed to dissipate the fine fragrance of his tender mood. One could not live on memories; one had to have reality. He wanted her, wanted her for himself, present, tangible, always; and this desire was like a growing darkness within. He slowed his steps and the expression of his face deadened.

He bought a paper, folded it, thrust it into his pocket, and then boarded the ferry. It was late and there were few passengers. He found a remote spot on the outer deck and listened to the rush of the waves as the boat thrust its way through the water. The moist air had a seaweedy smell. As he stared out at the dark moving waters, he thought of the far inland distances from which they came, pushing their way to the sea, carrying the eager freshness of the land into the dead, salt sameness of the ocean. It seemed to him that this was the way with men: their lives started out like a sweet stream from the vastness of eternity, and abruptly they were swallowed up by an ocean of selfish needs and desires.

He stood up and went into the salon. The place was empty, but there was light here and he wanted to be free of the dark-

ness and his thoughts. He sat down and opened the paper. The printed page was an indecipherable mass of words. He read, but no meaning was conveyed to his mind.

"Shine? Shine, sir?"

He put down the paper. A colored porter stood before him, his face creased in an ingratiating smile. "Shine 'em up, sir?" He gestured at Martin's shoes.

"No."

The porter shuffled away, and Martin put aside his paper and leaned back wearily in his chair.

It was then that he saw her. An unkempt, wretched woman huddled in a seat at the far corner of the salon. The lines of her disconsolate figure were familiar, hauntingly familiar; and slowly, as though out of the dim distance of a forgotten time, there formed the memory of how a young man in his moment of need had found consolation at the knee of just such a sorrow-stricken Mother. He stared at the dowdy dress dragging over her empty lap, and the blurred thought arose: she hasn't even got his body.

It now seemed monstrous that he had been able to walk past her without seeing her. His world had shrunk to such a petty circumference that in concentration on his own desires he had lost all vision of another's need; he had joined the dustied, restless, self-seeking herd; he had become like a tiny, clicking cog in the mechanical millrace of the trains.

Slowly, hesitantly, he approached her, as though entering a house wherein he had no right to tread. He sat down opposite her and wordlessly, humbly looked at the woman. And as he did so there rose up in him compassion, full and inexpressible.

She sensed his presence and her head came up. A glance of dull suspicion was directed at him. "What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"What're you sitting there for, then?"

He shifted uneasily. "I saw them take your boy away."

"Well, what's that to you?"

"I've got a mother."

"Let me alone."

She turned away from him and began to snuffle miserably in a dirty handkerchief. He wanted to say something, desperately he wanted to help her, but no words would come, for he felt himself a stranger, an intruder, and he had never felt that way in the face of need before.

After a while he stood up and went out on the deck. And there, staring again into the dark of the water, it came clearly to him! Having eyes only for himself and his own desires he had gone blind to the needs of others. The darkness of mood that had filled him these past weeks he could now understand, for he had lost the bright ideal that had lighted all his days.

He lifted his eyes to the distant skyline and its towers honeycombed with light. He thought of all the darkness that dwelt beneath that outward brightness. There was so little happiness on earth, and he had put forth his beggar's cup, beseeching his small share. Was it so wrong, this little bit of laughter and love that he had wanted? Must he pay so high for such a small selfishness? The answer came to him like a great burst of light, shocking him with its pitilessness and finality. Between darkness and light there is no fellowship; having Him he could have nothing else; in everything he touched or turned to he would find betrayal, if ever he betrayed Him.

The boat jolted into the dock; there was the clanking of windlass and chain as they warped the ferry fast. Suddenly remembering the old woman, he hurried into the salon. It was empty. Wildly he raced off the ferry and down the street. He caught up with her as she was boarding a streetcar and crowded into the seat beside her. She recognized him. "What are you following me for?" she asked.

"I just want to help you, if I can," he said.

Abruptly, all antagonism left her. Limp, unspeaking, she sat there in the swaying, noisy car, her grief-streaked face un-

lovely to the eye, and yet with something of dignity about her in her overwhelming sorrow.

There was much that Martin had to say to her now, but with the wisdom of deep sympathy he was completely silent.

Eventually, she began to speak. "He wasn't bad, I tell you he wasn't bad. He didn't have the chances other boys do. Maybe he did make a mistake, but there wasn't anyone to put him right."

He took her to a restaurant and got her hot coffee and some food. She wiped her tears and ate hungrily. "You're the only one that was good to me, mister. God bless your mother."

"That's a nice thing to say. Thank you."

Then she lapsed into maudlin sympathy for herself and her hard lot, for with her boy taken away where would she get support? A new defense of her son's blamelessness was proposed. Martin listened quietly, patiently, nodding his head in assent to whatever she said.

He accompanied her to her ramshackle tenement and pressed into her hand all the money he had. Walking the entire way home, the bitterness of the woman's tragedy was like grit in his mouth. Life was seamed with such hateful tears and heartbreak; an inexorable machine caught up lives and broke them, spewing them forth from beneath its crushing wheels and whirling cogs, indifferent to pain and misery.

His footsteps made hollow, brittle sounds as he strode along the deserted pavements. Beneath stately skyscrapers he walked, through shadow-haunted, dank alleys, past rat-ridden wharves and fetid tenements, past parks and homes, across the slick, asphalted carpets of the wide avenues; and he did not walk alone. Ghostly footsteps seemed to surge about him, those of the lost, the dead, the gone. And the sound was as a whispering voice in the darkened air about him. They became to him the footsteps of passion and greed, of hunger and seeking, of love and hate and hope, of driving lust and grinding need, the footsteps of eagerness and desperation. Here on the false altars

of the soulless streets countless men had laid down the sacrifice of their visions, their hopes and their strivings. All the frustration and utter weariness of the living seemed fused with the blown, broken hopes of the dead, the lost and gone. And there in the night's reverent darkness, in the cathedral calm of the dead city street, Martin felt all these discords gathered up inside himself into a deep compassion that became a prayer. Like ascending music that prayer went upward from the haunts of the hopeless and the dead, pleading that the end of the song be not silence, that the way be not all tears and sorrow, that peace and fulfillment come at last. The way of his destiny stretched clear before him, serene, great, noble and unending, a clean, straight way, wide as the heavens and as sure as the stars.

One had to be free to help others, and these past weeks he had been captive. That was ended. With one swift, sharp stroke he would end it.

He labored late that night over a letter to Alice. It was hard to begin, but at long last the opening words had come.

Dear Alice—

You always wanted to read that little black book of mine and I'm going to let you see a part of it now. The enclosed page I've torn out of the book. It's the first page. Read it carefully, because it will make clear to you what I'm going to try to say...

She did not reply, and, when Saturday arrived, he went up to visit her as he had promised.

Stony-eyed, Alice sat in her room, his letter outspread before her. She lifted up the page, its edge jagged where Martin had ripped it from the book. The black ink stared up at her from the whiteness of the page like a judicial decree:

To live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures; to be a member of each family, yet belonging to none; to share

all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets; to heal all wounds; to go from men to God and offer Him their prayers; to return from God to men to bring pardon and hope; to have a heart of fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity; to teach and to pardon, console and bless always—what a glorious life! And it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ!

“Lacordaire wrote that,” said Martin quietly.

Alice lifted her head, and her voice was dull. “What has this got to do with us?”

“Last Sunday, when I came home I read that. It put a new light on everything.”

“You want to go back to it then?”

“Yes.”

A long silence held them. Martin fumbled for a way to explain the greatness, the importance of what he now saw so clearly. Alice’s soul turmoiled with fear and anger. Her voice was low with the restraint put upon it. “Do you love me?”

Martin’s eyes were on her face, pleading, and his voice was gentle. “It came upon us slowly, softly, Alice, unawares. I didn’t know that it is the soft things of life that you’ve got to look out for.”

“You kissed me.”

“When Steve left the seminary it broke me all up. He was the last of my friends. I was left alone, and it looked like the end of everything. And then I found myself again. Even alone, the seminary was the place for me. I felt sure of that; I was going back, and I was happy again.”

“You were happy because we were together. We belong together. Do you love me?”

He looked at her pleadingly. “To live in the world without wishing its pleasures—” The words rose to his lips as though he were unaware of them.

“Do you? Do you?”

He turned away. “Don’t ask me that.”

She went up to him and her voice, for all her fear, was gentle. "Haven't I a right to know?"

He faced her. "Yes, you have a right to know, Alice."

"Well?"

"I'm going back."

"To that silly one-track way of living, to those warped ideals?"

"Your ideals are so much a part of you, Alice, that to deny them is to deny yourself."

"Did yours make you happy?"

"Yes."

"Indeed? And for the past weeks you've been eaten up with melancholy—why? Why? I'll tell you why. Because you were away from me."

"No, Alice. You were always with me. It was because I was away from that." He pointed to the paper.

Her hand clenched over the paper. "Then all the fine flowery words you poured into my ears up there on the hill—what were they?"

"I was trying to help you. You were unhappy, Alice. That's the job of a priest, to show people the right way. A priest is for men."

She looked at him a while and then down to the crumpled paper in her hand. It all came down to this: that stupid seminary or herself. It seemed unbelievable that an inanimate institution could weave such unbreakable bonds; it was frightening that over the brightness of her love should loom this remote, unfeeling fantasm of stone. "What can you hope to find in that kind of life?"

He looked up. "It tells you in that paper."

"Stupid words!" She flung the paper to the floor. "There's no reality in it, no future, I tell you."

"Alice!" He put forth his hand pleadingly, but she struck it away from her.

"Go back to it then. Let it kill this one bright thing that



has come into your life. When you wake up and see how empty of hope and happiness it has left you, then remember me—to whom it has done the same.”

The suffering that filled his face bit deeply into her, and she would have recalled the words if she could. She turned her back to hide the tears, the helpless, hopeless tears.

“More than anything else on earth I have wanted this, Alice—I told you that last week; but now more than anything else on earth I want you to understand.”

“I understand well enough. Only one thing counts, what *you* want.”

“No, Alice, that doesn’t count at all; only what’s true.”

“Isn’t my love true?” He did not reply. She spun about. “Isn’t it?”

“Yes, and mine too.”

“Then go; go back to it. It’s more to you than I am.”

A sense of utter futility came down upon Martin. How had all this happened? A few weeks ago they had been happy together, innocently happy, and here they were locked in bitter quarreling. Now all was distorted. She repudiated, he defended; and her violent bitterness cut across his soul more deeply than Steve’s defection had. Eventually Steve had come to see the truth, but he feared Alice never would.

It was late Saturday night that Martin returned from his visit to Alice. He made no explanations for his sudden return, and his mother did not question him. Slackly, he sat upon the edge of his bed and watched her as she unpacked his suitcase, only half hearing the happy run of her conversation. The love and pleasure shining through all her words and actions told him how sorely even a brief absence affected her. He looked up, aware of the sudden silence. “What is it, mother?”

“It’s beautiful,” she said, handing a sheet of paper to him. “It fell out of your prayer book.”

Mechanically, he took it, glanced at it, and handed it back

to her. "Lacordaire wrote it." He gazed a moment at her. "You're happy, aren't you, mother?"

"Yes, son, very happy. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking of the first time I went away. You weren't happy then."

"I've grown used to it now, and I'm not just proud anymore. I am happy, too, real happy."

He stooped quickly and kissed her.

"It's all crumpled," she said.

"What?"

"The page."

"Oh."

"Why don't you write it out clean on another page, so you don't lose it?"

"I don't need to. I've got it by heart."

## *Chapter 31*

THE summer was drawing to a close, and it was Martin's last week of work. Seated on the pavement, their backs against a store window shaded by an awning, Martin and Pete ate their lunch. Martin dipped a tin cup into a bucket of water and drank deeply. "Nothing like water, Pete, when you're thirsty," he called out to his companion seated a little distance from him. Pete nodded, his mouth full of food. "Want some?" Pete shook his head in refusal and pointed to the bottle of milk beside him.

Martin placed the cup in his lap and took up a sandwich. He bit into it hungrily. Seated there with the hurrying sounds of feet on the pavement before him, he thought back to the quietness of an unmoving hill, its swelling sides peopled with silent armies of standing green grain. There he had heard the voice of contentment singing low and clear through him, and now strangely enough the same voice arose in him. Here in the push of the hurrying, seeking crowds, he found welling up in him a sense of satisfaction and joy. A glow of pride went through him, for this was his city and these were his people. It was the greatest city on earth.

A loud-speaker from the music store in back of him blared forth the latest popular tune. Martin began to sing blithely.

Pete looked at him. "You feeling good, eh?"

"On top of the world, Pete."

Pete grinned and then turned back to the business of demolishing his lunch.

Almost with affection Martin studied the crowds. He was close to all their needs and unhappiness, knowing their hours of plodding hard work, their bright visions of success, and that this success was realized by only a rare few. A nation rose no higher than its spiritual values. A sadness came over him that so much of the fine fervor of work was lost in concentration on material values. He saw them, like bumbling little bees, staggering over the blind pavements, rounding out the monotone of work and sleep, of sleep and work that made up their living. They were of the earth, and they were killers of the earth; for into their hands came all the wealth of the fecund soil, and they burned it, cut and hammered and twisted it into the forms that would bring money. Money—that was the be-all and the end-all of their existence.

He sat hunched up, his eyes, pensive with thought, watching the array of legs flickering past him—trousered legs, silk-stockinged legs, light, daintily-tapping shoes, hurrying, solid shoes. He could see in their tempo the pride of life, the drag of tiredness, the lilt of expectancy. The pavement and its rhythms, the canyoned rhythms of the city stream!

A pair of shoes came to rest before him. The toes were pointed directly at him. A girl. She must be looking at the merchandise in the window in back of him. Slowly he looked up and his jaws stopped munching.

"Hello, Marty."

Marty gulped convulsively and cleared his throat. "Alice!" He stood up, his face shining with the happiness of this unexpected encounter; and then concern rapidly covered his gladness. Her eyes were filled with petition and distress. "What is it, Alice?"

"I must speak to you, Marty. I held out as long as I could."

They went into the doorway of the music shop. Martin,

self-conscious because of Alice's dainty appearance and his own soil-torn, sweat-stained clothes, hung back.

A white-faced clerk limped up to her. He smiled ingratiatingly. "Is there anything I can do for you, miss?"

She stared at him a moment, trying to bring her thoughts into focus. "Brahms," she finally decided. "Have you a recording of his Third Symphony?"

"Most certainly." He limped to a shelf and brought back the desired volume. His gaze transferred to Martin hovering in the background. "Yes?"

"I'm with her," mumbled Martin.

The clerk looked questioningly at Alice. She nodded assent. "Give him the records," she requested. "Is there a room available?"

They entered the glassed-in cubicle and Martin set the records upon the machine. The music began to play. They sat in silence staring at the phonograph. Finally Alice spoke. "I tried to write, Marty, but the words wouldn't come. I had to see you." She looked small and miserable. "I'm sorry for what I said. I wasn't myself. Do you forgive me?"

Martin clasped his hands hard together. "There's nothing to forgive, Alice."

Her murmured reply was lost in the marvels of sound filling the room. The music swelled into a swiftly rising crescendo, and then abruptly stopped. There was a clicking sound, and another record fell into place. The music began again.

"I don't know what to do, Marty," she said in a low voice. "I've—I've been desperate these past days. I don't want to stand in the way of what you want, but something keeps hammering away inside of me telling me it's wrong, it's cruel, that you're wrecking your life." She stopped, and the worry in her eyes was softened into a vast pity. "Don't you see, Marty, don't you understand? You are being so selfish in your unselfishness."

"We've talked that out already, Alice," he said quietly. "I can't do anything about this. It's something I can't fight, I can't deny, because if I do I'll deny myself."

"You are the only joy I have ever had, Marty. Don't go away from me, don't leave me, please."

"If I stay, there will be no joy for me, nor for you, Alice."

"Oh, why do you say such things, Marty? Why?"

"What it is in me that you love will be gone, will be dead. That's why."

"I'll always love you, Marty, always."

"I'd be another person."

It was true. For a time, there in the park, he had been different, and, perhaps, his loss of contentment had been bound up with his half-formed decision to leave the seminary. Now that he was determined to go back he seemed to be his old self again. What was one to do?

"I've prayed, Martin. I've prayed that you would change, that you would see clearly, that you would see it my way. It was no good. You're the same."

"Can't you understand, Alice? This isn't a daydream, believe me. It's a compulsion."

"Isn't this love within me a compulsion, too?"

"All love is."

They sat in dead silence. She understood that he had given his final word, that he cherished a higher love than that which had lain between them, and that he had yielded to that higher love as wholeheartedly as she had to hers. She fought back the tears. She would be as resolute as he.

"You will go back to the seminary, Marty, to seal yourself by vows to a life-long mistake. That's the fear that is tearing me to pieces: It isn't selfishness speaking now, oh believe me, Marty. It is just my love for you standing off and looking on—and yet wanting to keep you from danger and harm. You will not find there what you seek."

"I have already found it, Alice. If only I could make you understand and share it!"

Weariedly she stood up. "It's finished."

He stared at her, and she gestured towards the phonograph. The music had stopped. He stood up, switched off the phonograph, and gathered up the records. As from a distance she heard his voice filled with inexpressible pleading. "Alice, please, won't you—"

"It's no use, Marty. All the words have been said. You see something that is all darkness to me; and what light I have found is just darkness to you. It's useless."

They went out of the room. "I don't want the records," she told the clerk, and left the shop.

At the door they parted. "Good-by, Marty."

He took her outstretched hand and held it in his open palm, staring fixedly, helplessly at it. He had wanted so much to help, and all he had done was to hurt. Her hand slid away, and she merged with the throng of hurrying people.

Martin went back to his work and approached the boss. "I want my time," he stated. "I'm quitting."

He crossed the street, walked a block and came to Melrose Avenue. The spire of the church, with its cross of gold, thrust upwards into the sky, above the dust and dirt and noise, like a brazen serpent in the city's desert of stone.

He knelt in the restful dark, the quieting dark, and bowed his head in hopeless misery. Unheeding, he had gone his way; unthinking, he had trod the edge of the precipice. If only he had listened, if only he had remembered. "A relationship can begin in the spirit and end—differently." Father White had told him, had warned him, but that had not applied to him. *He* was different. But he was not, he was like all the rest; and the age-old wisdom of the seminary had known that. In his own eyes he was unworthy of all that he had striven for. If the seminary knew of his behavior what could they do but reject him?

An old priest came slowly up the aisle, knelt a while in prayer, and then entered the confessional.

After a while Martin rose and took his place in the line of waiting penitents.



## Chapter 32

WITH the self-possessed air of a man accustomed to travel, Steve threaded his way down the aisle of the interurban smoker. He located a vacant seat, stored his valise and hat in the rack above him, and settled back into the seat. Idly, he stared out of the window at the remembered landmarks, a great peacefulness and contentment within him.

The light caught against the windowpane at a strange angle and, for a moment, Steve saw the reflected image of himself—the carefully groomed hair, the well-cut clothes. The passage of two years had worked many changes in him. Two years! He thought back to the last time he had ridden this train, of the bitterness, the defeat that had been in him. He had been going away, and now he was returning. His gaze came back to focus upon the altered face that stared at him from the windowpane. It was but a ghost image. The angle of light changed and abruptly the image was gone. And with it his mood of contentment left him.

He had been successful, and yet there was no real satisfaction in it. The train clacked monotonously onward and, by some quirk of memory, there came back to him the recollection of that night on the elevated when he and Martin had ridden hour after hour in their effort to come to a decision about Marty's fate. Out of that welter of words there rose the

remembrance of Martin's question: "They might give you another chance, Steve. Why not try it?" And his answer that had been half a promise: "I may, later on." He had meant the words when he said them. At that particular moment the thought of returning to the seminary had seemed the most desirable thing on earth. But he had been caught up by other interests and activities since then. He had found the fascination that there is in the business of buying and selling. There was a give and take about it that he liked, meeting all types of people and pitting one's ingenuity against theirs, and each completed deal took on the nature of a conquest. It had made him feel alive, real, important. It was only at moments like this that an adding-up took place.

There had been five of them—and now there was only one. Unhappily he stared out of the window. Across the flat fields he could see the dim, distant outline of the seminary building. It looked lost out there on the far horizon, a thing of silence and separation. But he knew the thrill of expectancy that would be pulsing through its halls at this moment, the stir of preparation for the great event that would take place tomorrow. For another ordination day had arrived.

And among the ordinands was one who had been as close—perhaps closer—to him as his own brother: Marty. He wondered whether the honor that the coming day would bring would alter the intimacy of their friendship. It had been so deep and frank and loyal. But things changed as the years went by, one's appearance, one's ideas and one's friends. Perhaps this friendship between him and Marty, too, would change. But whether it did or not, there was one part of it that he would always hold and cherish—the remembrance that in his moment of greatest need Martin had come to him.

It had been a warm August night when he came. "I've got to talk with you, Steve," Martin had said.

Steve was in the midst of a belated supper. "Right now?"

"Yes. I'm in trouble."

They had walked along 149th Street and then turned down Willis Avenue. Nothing much was said until they came to the bridge. Leaning over the railing, gazing into the sluggish dark of the river, he had heard the story of Alice and Martin. He could grasp all the grief and pain that the halting recital held, but Martin's scruples about returning he had not been able to understand.

"You broke off with her, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You want to go back now, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then go. You're doing right. What the seminary doesn't know won't hurt it."

"That's not right. It can't be right. I've got to tell them. I know fully now what it all means and I am willing to accept it, but they must judge whether I'm fit to go on."

There had been no budging him from his avowed intention. Steve remembered then the certificate required for readmission after each vacation. He had prevailed upon him to lay the whole matter before the pastor. It had been the right thing to do. The shrewd, kindly old priest had had a long talk with Martin, but he had not attempted to settle the matter at once. Some arrangement had been made between them, and during the final weeks of vacation Marty had been a frequent visitor at the rectory. What passed between them during these conversations Steve did not know, but he gathered from Martin's general attitude that the outlook was not as hopeless as Martin had judged it to be. Eventually the pastor had written a letter to Father Stoner, and in it there must have been his own personal recommendations on the matter, for the way was cleared for Martin's return to the seminary.

During the past two years Marty had written him frequently from the seminary. They had been together a number of times during the summer and Christmas vacations. The pastor's judgment had been sound. Martin was a new person,

happier than he had ever known him to be, the only truly happy one of the five. Dick was happily-enough married, Joe successfully launched on a medical career, Rube flourishing as assistant manager of the local garage, but—they were all failures, himself included. And yet, there was not the faintest trace of envy in him for Martin's success. He knew the crucible of trial through which Martin had had to pass in order to reach his goal, and in his own heart he could only feel a deep joy and gratitude that at least one of them had had the courage to persevere.

A man with a thin, pointed nose came into the smoker. There were dried out hollows in his cheeks and his jaws worked spasmodically on some chewing gum. Purposefully he thrust his way down the aisle and dropped into the seat beside Steve. With ill-mannered loudness he cleared his throat, and plucked a cigar out of the breast pocket of his coat. He glanced at Steve. "Got a light?"

"Yes, sir."

He lit the cigar. "Thanks." He held the cigar out in front of him and studied it. "I oughtn't to smoke these things. It's a bad habit." His jaws convulsed about the gum. "Are you commuting?"

"No."

The ferrety eyes studied the clean-shaven, ruddy face, the expensive pin-striped suit. "I'll bet you're selling something," he ventured.

Steve faced him and smiled. "For the past two years I've been in real estate."

A triumphant grin creased the questioner's face. "Knew it right off. I can spot 'em a mile." He thrust forth a hand. "Shake. I've been peddling insurance for thirty years. Braggs is my name."

"Glad to know you. Mine's Kolesar."

They launched into a discussion of business. Steve's gaze

strayed frequently to the panorama outside of the train windows.

Mr. Braggs abhorred silence. He noticed the direction of his companion's gaze. "Lots of land out here."

"Uh-huh."

"See those towers way off there?"

"Yes."

"That's a priest factory." Quiet amusement came into Steve's eyes. "Got a couple hundred young fellows in training there."

"That's quite an establishment."

"You bet your life. You know, I often wondered what goes on inside of that place."

"They study, of course."

"Study what? I've stopped my car a couple of times and watched the place. It's a crazy setup. They walk around in twos and threes, and every once in a while a bell rings, and then they all go inside and have a drink." His companion looked at him in a strange way. "Pretty soft, eh? Only one drawback that I can see—no women." He gave a leering grin, but when no response was forthcoming his face straightened out. "Maybe they've got something there though. The trouble I've had with women!"

Mr. Braggs looked darkly at the cigar butt in his hand, and, after a while, threw it on the floor. He was in a mood to unburden himself about his impending divorce and its attendant difficulties, but his companion did not rise to the opening he had offered, for his eyes were fixed on those towers in the distance. "That's a piece of property that should interest you. A mile all around it, and the buildings! You ought to see the buildings."

"Were you ever inside?"

"Once. I tried to sell the head man some fire insurance."

Steve broke out laughing. "That was a waste of time."

"What are you laughing at?"

"They specialize in fire insurance."

"Huh?"

"Hell—you know, they keep you from going there."

The point finally went home. "Oh, that. That's a sort of long-range view of the proposition though. I don't believe in that kind of stuff—hell I mean. A fellow makes his own hell or heaven here on earth."

"He sure does."

"It's a good proposition though if you can get enough people to believe it. I've seen a lot of priests in the city. They do all right. Nice places to live in, big churches and good cars. It must be a real gravy train."

The silence drew out to an ominous length. A ridge of muscle along Steve's jaw line stood out with sudden prominence and then abruptly flattened away. "Mr. Braggs," he finally said in a voice devoid of all friendliness, "you don't get on any train without a ticket. You pay your money, and you get your ticket. I happen to know that the ticket for this 'gravy train' comes high, very high—you've got to give up gravy."

The emphatic seriousness of the words immobilized Mr. Bragg's gum-chewing operations; then he cleared his throat with loud and nervous embarrassment. "I wouldn't know; I don't belong to the lodge." He gave a mechanical grin. "I went to some kind of a church when I was a kid; you know, Sunday school and all that."

There was no interest in Steve's voice. "What happened?"

"Business; you know how it is. A fellow kind of gets away from church after you're out making a living. You go to church yet?"

"Uh-huh."

"Baptist?"

"No."

"Episcopalian?"

"No. Catholic."

Mr. Braggs speedily backed up and reviewed his conversation. There had been some things that might not have sounded so well. "It's a great organization; one of the best in the world they tell me. Of course, I don't know what Catholics believe from sour apples, except that the top man is the Pope. That's right, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"I read a lot about him when Al Smith was running for President. You know, I think he'd have been all right for that job. He couldn't have been any worse than what we've got now, that's for sure."

The train was slackening speed, and Steve stood up abruptly and hauled down a satchel. Braggs looked at him in amazement. "You getting out here?"

"That's right."

Mr. Braggs stared. "There's no town here. There's only that—that priest place I was telling you about."

"I know. I used to work there, or maybe I should say they worked on me."

Mr. Bragg's mouth dropped open. "Well, what do you know!" he breathed.

The train jolted to a sudden stop, and Steve lurched against the window frame. Clumsily, he struggled into the aisle, gave a vague wave of farewell, and hurried out, leaving in back of him an insurance salesman with no words.

Satchel in hand, Steve walked down the familiar stretch of long straight road with the twin towers rising high at the end of it. It had been a long time, and there was a curious sense of home-coming deep within him. Nothing had changed: the same wide sweep of sky, the same smooth, stretching fields. Years ago, he had walked this way, and the fields had been dull with the brown of autumn; now they were springing with the bright green of the resurgent spring.

## Chapter 33

FATHER WHITE, master of ceremonies for the great occasion, entered the room. A surplice was folded over one arm and he kept fingering its lace border as he spoke to the group of young men to be ordained. "The day of days is here, gentlemen. I have just come from the parlor where I have instructed your parents about our traditional little custom. You will now go down to the parlor and kneel before your parents. They will impart to you their parental blessing, for the last time. Immediately after the ordination, you will all return to the parlor, and then they will receive your priestly blessing, for the first time. You are still on retreat, so please do not speak to them as yet."

He smiled at them, and the silent assemblage of young men stood up and left the room.

In the parlor the relatives of the young men to be ordained had been lined up alphabetically about the walls of the room. They stood in hushed, expectant groups. The door swung open and a file of cassocked figures entered. A slim, serious-faced youth made his way towards a graying lady, and knelt before her. She lifted troubled eyes to the man at her side. "What—what shall I say, Steve?" she whispered.

"Nothing out loud, Mrs. Manning," he advised in a kindly whisper. "Just put your hands on his head."



"Nothing else?"

"That's all."

Her hands rested lightly on Martin's head—for the last time, the priest had said. He was going away now for good. Her fingers slipped down the sides of his face and under his chin; his eyes, quiet, calm and very happy looked up at her. His eyes, deep, dark, soft—her eyes. His hand came up, laid hold of her fingers and pressed them to his lips. She smiled bravely at him through the pain of her loss. He was on his feet again, his eyes flicked towards Steve, and then he was walking away.

Quietly, Martin mounted the stairs to his room. Before him on a table lay the vestments, the amice, the alb and the cincture. He sat down, the pain and loss which he had seen in his mother's eyes still deep within him. He knew now how that frightened old mother had felt that fateful day in the Lackawanna Station when they had taken her boy away from her. It had been a long time ago, but he would never forget it.

He sat down before his desk, and his eyes strayed to the letter lying there, and the handwriting once so familiar. It had been on a New York sidewalk that Alice and he had parted; in the midst of the hurrying throngs he had seen her go, powerless to help her, helpless to make her understand. The rest had been silence. A long unbroken silence, of months and of years. He had sent out the invitations for his ordination, chaste white cards with embossed black lettering, and one of them had gone to Alice. Her answer had come the day before retreat. It had been like a voice out of the long ago, a voice from the forgotten life of turmoil and indecision that awoke in the pages of her reply, and it had stirred him deeply.

Dear Marty—

Your invitation arrived today. So many times during the past two years I have wanted to write to you, but my pride has held me silent. Always there has been a faint gleam of hope that some day you would come to see my viewpoint. Your invitation puts

an end to that hope. And yet, strangely enough, I feel a certain satisfaction in knowing that you had the strength to follow out your ideals.

Last summer I spent my vacation in familiar surroundings. Every day I used to walk to our spot on the hilltop for an hour of quiet by the lake. I have learned the meaning of loneliness and I have found the peace that underlies it. There is only one thing sweeter than happy hours, and that is the remembrance of them.

Perhaps wisdom comes with the passage of time. I do not feel the hurt of your going away so much any more, but there is still within me the denial of what seems so real to you. It is not so violent as when we last talked, but it is real none the less. An abstract love cannot fill the hunger in your heart. That hunger is part of us, it is the nature of us to want and need human love, tangible love, and with it we are rounded, fulfilled; without it we are a cipher that fits into no sum or equation.

I am coming to your ordination, Marty, not in order to reflect the thin glory of your momentary success, but because I want to see you again and to read in your eyes the truth of what I hold, the vindication of what I once said and now repeat. Even in this moment when the seminary confers on you what it considers its highest honor, when it sends you forth to represent it and all it stands for, you will feel in the very depths of your heart, because you are sincere and truthful, that this is merely a thing of your mind, unreal, and that you are not fulfilled, that it is not the right way, that it was never meant for you.

Devotedly yours,  
Alice

It was a bitter thing to have received this letter at the very outset of his retreat. All through the days of silence and final preparation the words of her letter haunted him; it was to him a voice, a child's voice plaintively calling for some one to direct it in the dark. Quiet she had found over the months, but not happiness, and he wanted her to have it, deep, satisfying happiness even as he now had it. For he had never wavered from the decision he had made two years ago. The abiding joy

that it had brought was proof to him of its rightness and truth.

Martin put on the amice, the alb and the stole, the robes of the priest, whose function in life, as the Retreat Master had told them but yesterday, was to sacrifice and to be sacrificed. He was ready now. The ceremony of ordination was about to begin and in a few moments he would stand at the steps of the altar and pronounce his "*Introibo ad altare Dei*, I shall go in unto the altar of God."

## Chapter 34

THE church wore its festive robes. Steve's eyes slowly gazed about the well-remembered edifice, the mellow light falling through the huge stained-glass windows of the transept, the white smoothness of the statues, the firm overshadowing of the rounded arches. Like all the rest of the eager, waiting congregation, he was a stranger in this sanctuary, a transient who had come to witness a ceremony and then would depart. He, who had spent years here, who might have been one of the protagonists in the solemn spectacle about to be enacted, was now merely a mute spectator, a visitor for a day. He thought back on the years spent here, the years of promise, the dead years, the years beyond recall.

The deep-toned organ suddenly thrust a flourish of chords into the expectant stillness. Simultaneously, the sanctuary flashed into dazzling brilliance as hundreds of hidden lights shot forth their radiance. The organ paused, and then in a shattering concord of tightly packed harmony it rolled forth its fortissimo accompaniment to the choir. "*Ecce—Behold!*" The throbbing firmness of the voices filled the edifice. "*Sacerdos Magnus—the Great Priest—the High Priest!*" The voices lifted to the highest pitch of their range, and the heads of the congregation turned slowly towards the entrance through which the episcopal procession was entering. Gravely, un-

hurriedly, the line moved into the church, the acolytes and the cross, the surpliced seminarians, the white-robed ordinands, the priests and the Bishop.

The people stared openly, and Steve with them. Abruptly, his gaze swerved and focused on a solitary figure. She was walking quietly down the side aisle, a small figure in a smartly tailored suit, with a worldly little hat crowning the luxuriousness of her dark hair. Steve's eyes widened with wonder. What could she be doing here? He saw her being led to a pew in the apse. Her assurance, her ease somehow troubled him.

Alice looked about her at the people, at the stately overshadowing arches, and she was aware of the chorus of exultant voices. An electric vibrancy permeated the air. She had sensed it at other events—expectancy, the pulse-beat of the people. There is no drama in the drudgery of ordinariness. The herd takes its happiness vicariously in the storybook victories of others. It was an escape from reality, and she would have none of it. She would face reality. Inwardly she was a core of cold antagonism, for this was the seminary, the hard unfeeling thing that had taken away her love from her.

And yet, even at this moment, she could feel the expectancy of the gathered throng reaching out like an insidious, unseen influence and stirring a faint quiver of response within her. Irritably, she tried to put it away from her, tried to put herself above it.

A priest mounted the pulpit and his voice rang clear and compellingly through the church. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and according to his custom, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read. And the volume of *Isaiah* the prophet was handed to him. And after he opened the volume, he found the place where it was written,

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;  
because he has anointed me;*

*The Chosen*

*To bring good news to the poor he has sent me,  
to proclaim to the captives release,  
and sight to the blind;  
To set at liberty the oppressed...*

And closing the volume, he gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were gazing on him. But he began to say to them: Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

The speaker paused. "Today this episode is repeated before your eyes."

Alice opened up a booklet that she found lying in the pew. The Rite of Ordination. With a determined effort of will she concentrated on its contents, reading the explanation of the ceremonies that were to follow, deliberately shutting out the words of the preacher. He was crudely attempting to beat up the expectations of the people to fever pitch for the ceremonies that were to follow. She would not be mesmerized by some oratorical periods and an orotund voice.

It was difficult to focus attention on reading, however, with that voice dominating the edifice. She looked up at the statue that graced the altar in the niche before her—the *Pietà*. It was lovely. The white marble seemed to live. She wondered if ever Martin had come here to pray. He would have liked the stark beauty of the chiseled figures.

The preacher's voice had ceased. The pulpit was empty. She brought her gaze back to the sanctuary. The ordinands were prostrate now, several long lines of recumbent, white forms. In grave words, hallowed with the dignity of age-old use, the Bishop addressed to them a monition telling them of the need of faith and immolation for those who assumed the dignity of the priesthood.

They rose and the conferring of the priesthood began. A stole was placed about the shoulders of each of them. "Receive the yoke of the Lord, for His yoke is sweet and His burden

light." They were garbed in a chasuble. "Receive the chasuble vestment, symbol of charity, for God has power to increase thy charity and perfect thy work."

The solemnity of the scene in the sanctuary, the grave, unhurried movements, the quiet reverence of the people, and the dim distant-seeming music of the organ were weaving a spell about her. She focused her attention hard on the altar. The quiet she had won for herself over the past years must not be lost by a heedless giving-in to a rush of emotion. Desperately, she strove to control a rising sense of turbulence.

The hands of the ordinands were being anointed. The palms were turned upward so that the sides and the little fingers touched each other. The Bishop dipped his thumb into the holy oil and drew a line from the thumb of the right hand to the index finger of the left and from the thumb of the left hand to the index finger of the right, and then anointed the whole of both palms, praying the while: "Deign, O Lord, to consecrate and sanctify these hands by this unction and our blessing, that whatever they shall bless shall be blessed and whatever they shall consecrate shall be consecrated and made holy in the name of the Lord."

Within her were voices of pain, of love, and of loss. Martin's hands lying supinely there on the lap of the Bishop and over them flowing the oil of consecration. The hands that she had clasped were being taken away from her, set aside for the comforting, the care of others, and would never more be clasped in hers. She had wanted, O God, how she had wanted love and happiness, and it had all come to this. What had she done to be so treated? What had Martin done to be so blinded? In lightning flashes of remembrance she recalled scenes and words, and, with suddenly sharpened vision, she realized now that this could have been the only outcome; and the inevitableness of things came over her like a choking cloud. Smooth, flowing tides, as irresistible as water and as fluid as air, the forces of life had conspired against her, bending her to their

will, giving her love and then taking it away. Dully she raised her eyes.

The ordinands were touching the chalice and the host while the Bishop conferred upon them the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. And dimly she remembered from the days of childhood the Sisters in school teaching, explaining how through all the centuries this had been the greatest form of worship—sacrifice. It had been just so many words; but here, before her very eyes, the words were taking on meaning and reality. One who was intimately known to her was being readied for the task of sacrificing and of being sacrificed. And what that meant she began to understand, for the pain of it was in her own heart.

The voices of the white-robed young men suddenly lifted, firm and clear, joining the Bishop's as he said the Mass. Majestically each prayer was intoned. "Lift up your hearts," they exhorted; but though she could sense the complete renunciation of these young priests, she could find no answering surrender in her own heart. They were away from earth chanting the prayer of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy." They were drinking of Christ's chalice and they would drink of it to the very end. The care of the flock was being given them by the Good Shepherd, His mercy and forgiveness would be in their disposal, His words of comfort and sureness on their lips. It was all there in the words of the Bishop: "I will not now call you servants but friends; for you have known all that I have accomplished in your midst."

He was taken from her now; there was nothing left but unending aloneness and emptiness, and it was to go on and on, a thin tortuous river of darkness. Would it ever widen out into the quiet ways of peace and would she ever know joy again? The haunting memories of remembered things were dying here now, dying a deathless death.

The cup of her feelings brimmed over. All the mourning and loss and all the bitterness and misery of mankind's broken



and unfulfilled loves seemed gathered up in her one small heart. She bowed her head in her hands. In the midst of all those people she was alone, her sorrow putting her apart in a small barren blackness that was like death.

Desolately, with a great longing in her heart for comfort, she lifted her head. There before her stood grief incarnate. A Mother with the love of her life drooping in death on her knees. Over the features lay a sorrow so great that it seemed lost to its own sorrow, to have gone out of itself and to have taken in the sorrow of all the world. The broken-hearted, the misunderstood, the homeless, the unloved, all stood gathered up in her person.

And suddenly Alice felt herself no longer alone. She understood, for she was in the presence of one who, too, had lost her only Love.

Like a tide of rising music, some formless force swelled up in Alice's heart. A curious lightness wove through her sadness, weaving a pattern of light that grew out of the darkness and absorbed it. She was unaware of the conclusion of the ordination, for deep within her was a rising swell of sweetness, mounting until it broke over her in a wave of gladness.

She saw the white-robed men walking processionally from the church, and suddenly she saw them as a firm, eager, curving force, sweeping forth against an enemy grown old with all the trickery and deceit of decadence and greed. They were flinging their youth rashly against a foe that had them outnumbered and outplanned; and yet they had in them the immovable steadiness and sureness of truth.

And she had tried to keep him from that! Through all their talks and conflicts there had been this weak wail of her loneliness, trying to restrain him, to hold him, a suffering smallness within her that raised its thrusting, small white hands, trying to hold back the workings of divine unselfishness with moral pettiness.

It had not been the seminary that claimed him, it had been God. She saw him now as something sacred, fine—the chosen. Against all obstacles, himself and herself, he had proven worthy to be the chosen, and it filled her with a mounting joy that once she had been so close to him. “Dear Mother of God,” she whispered, “make me worthy to have loved him.”

The parents and relatives stood about the parlor in nervously expectant, silent groups. A strange happiness pervaded them, and they were reluctant to break it by speech. The door opened and the newly-ordained priests entered. Martin came swiftly towards his mother. She went down on her knees, Steve at her side. Martin’s hands rested lightly on her head, and the words of his first blessing murmured clearly and quietly above her: “O God, who hast ordered us to honor our father and mother, pour forth upon my mother the riches of Thy mercy, grant to her perfect health of mind and body, the consolation and joy of Thy Holy Spirit and the glory of eternal beatitude. Through Christ our Lord.” He passed to Steve, and blessed him. Then he stooped forward swiftly and helped his mother to her feet. She clung to him, kissed him shyly, almost reverently, her eyes bright with joyous tears. “It was lovely, heavenly; O Marty, my Marty!”

All about them the scene was being repeated and tongues were loosened. The radiant joy of the newly-ordained priests seemed to have imparted itself to the fathers and mothers, sisters, brothers and friends who had this morning seen them taken away irrevocably from them. Happiness surcharged everyone in the room. Steve felt it, and the source of it was vaguely present to him. He was aware that Marty at his side made him a sharer in it. In the deep recesses of his soul a solemn, portentous singing started, a song out of the long ago, a song from the days when life was on the surface:

Let us live then and be glad  
While young life's before us!  
After youthful pastime had,  
After old age hard and sad,  
Earth will slumber o'er us.

With an effort of will he tore his mind away from the surging song. It had no place here. It was pagan and cynical, it was a vain grasping after material pleasure, and here was true happiness; the stuff for which man had been made.

Steve came quietly down the aisle. The church was cavernous now in its emptiness, solemn in the utter absence of any sound; fumes of incense still clung to the air, and a flood of mellowed light striking through the huge stained-glass windows cast a wash of prismatic color across the shadowed transept.

There was only one worshiper. She was huddled forward on her knees before the *Pietà*, a young girl in a smartly tailored suit and a worldly hat. She was drooped forward and the lines of her figure were startlingly similar to those of the mournful replica before which she knelt.

She had not heard him enter the pew. After a while he leaned forward. "Alice," he whispered. Her head came up slowly. There were stains of tears on her cheeks, there were shining drops still brimming her eyes. She seemed unaware of them, unaware of him. For a long moment she looked at him. "Yes?" she asked.

He was at a loss for words. He wanted to say something to comfort her, but there was no sign of sorrow in her face. He looked at the tears, but there was deep quiet, almost contentment in her countenance. He wondered if she recognized him. "I'm Steve, Alice."

"I know. How did you find me, Steve?"

"I saw you come in at the beginning of the ordination."

"It was heavenly, wasn't it?" She caught his glance at her face and put her fingers up and felt the still wet tears on her cheeks. She opened her purse and took out a handkerchief. "I guess I must have been crying," she said very simply.

"Marty doesn't know you're here. Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, Steve, but—but not just yet. Isn't there some place where I can be alone for a little while?"

"Sure. There's a little parlor here. I'll show it to you." She stood up. Together they genuflected and left the church.

It was late afternoon, and Martin and Steve were showing Mrs. Manning the beauties of the seminary park, when a Brother came up to them. "There's a visitor waiting for you in the parlor, Father Manning."

Martin entrusted his mother to Steve's care and made his way back towards the building. A faint shadow seemed to have drifted across the day's brightness. A visitor! She had come—after it was all over.

He pushed open the door of the private parlor, and she rose to meet him. She had not changed, if anything she was more lovely, and remarkably self-possessed.

He went forward and stretched forth his hand. "You're late, Alice," he said.

She smiled easily and put her hand in his. "I'm not late, Marty. I was here for the ceremony."

"You weren't with mother and Steve."

"No; I was by myself. I'm used to being alone." She turned swiftly. "I'm the bearer of a gift. Steve commissioned me to give it to you." She gestured towards a cylindrical black box on the table.

Martin went to it and opened it, disclosing a chalice. He took it out. "It's beautiful."

"The gift of Steve and, in his own words, 'the rest of us

who flunked out.' He said I should tell you to remember, whenever you used it, that they still had a part in you."

"They will always have." He closed the case.

"And I, too?"

He looked up at her. "And especially you." She bent her head to hide the flush of pleasure that colored her face. He waited, but she did not raise her head. "Your letter, Alice . . . you were going . . ."

She lifted her head, and let him see the tears brimming her eyes.

"Oh, no, Alice, no; not . . ."

"Happy ones, Marty, the happiest ones of my life."

The distress faded from his face. "Truly?"

"Yes, Marty, truly." He waited, and she brushed impatiently at her eyes with the back of her hand. "Why must I be so silly at a time like this?" She looked up at him and divined his eagerness for her explanation, but she shook her head in refusal. "There—there just aren't words big enough." She turned, and her fingers played with the clasp on the cylindrical black box. "Tell me, Marty, what is it in us that makes us want to destroy what we love?"

She knew, at last, that the unselfishness she had loved in him would have died the moment she made it her exclusive own. Martin smiled at her. "It may be because we are part angel and part something else. You don't want a philosophical lecture from me on my ordination day, do you?"

"Oh, no, Marty. I want your blessing. You have one for me?"

"A very special one, Alice."

She knelt and he blessed her. She stood up and there were no longer any traces of tears in her eyes. "Father Manning," she confessed, "you once told me that a priest is for men. Perhaps, at that moment, I was too wrapped up in my own desires to grasp what those words really meant. I could not see, I could not understand what attraction there could be for you

or any one in living a life of such unselfishness." She turned her face fully to him, and let him see the happiness that suffused it, a quiet, strangely radiant happiness, as of a light from within. "But now I do understand."

THE END

















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